# PREMILLENNIALISM

GEORGE PRESTON MAINS

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RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE: ITS EVIDENTIAL VALUE.

JAMES M. BUCKLEY.

# Premillennialism

Non-Scriptural
Non-Historic
Non-Scientific
Non-Philosophical

By
GEORGE PRESTON MAINS

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TO THE MEMORY OF

CHARLES WESLEY GALLAGHER, D.D.

MY COLLEGE CLASSMATE AND CHUM. SCHOLARLY, INTENSELY HUMAN, WHITE-SOULED, TOO NOBLE OF NATURE TO HARBOR A MEANNESS. BOUND TO ME BY A LIFELONG AND INTIMATE FRIENDSHIP, A VERY COMRADE OF MY SOUL, MY WORLD IS SADLY POORER FOR HIS ABSENCE, BUT

I SHALL KNOW HIM WHEN WE MEET;
AND WE SHALL SIT AT ENDLESS FEAST,
ENJOYING EACH THE OTHER'S GOOD.

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# FOREWORD

THE literature of the apostolic age vividly reflects a general expectation of Christ's early return to the world. History proved an effectual extinguisher of this hope. The passing of several generations of Christians without the physical reappearance of Christ seemed invincibly to attest that this conviction was clearly a misconception—a mistranslation of Christ's own teaching and purposes concerning his second advent.

Premillennialism in Christian history has had a precarious tenure. During long periods its voice was hardly audible. Then, again, it has come to a sporadic and outspoken expression. The present seems to be marked as one of the periods of its most intense propagandism. Systematically, zealously, and apparently with strong financial support, its directing adherents are, in its interests, conducting a searching and far-flung educational campaign throughout the country.

If the premillennial philosophy is sound, it will abide. If it is fundamentally false, it merits dissection and exposure. I am among those who thoroughly believe that it represents a false and harmful philosophy of Christ's spiritual plans for the human world, therefore have I written.

Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, G. P. M.
January, 1920.

# CHAPTER I

## THE DOCTRINE DEFINED

CHRIST, in incarnate form, once visibly lived on the earth. He who was in the beginning with God, who was God, was made flesh and dwelt among men, and they beheld his glory, even as the Only-Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. "God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory." Nothing is historically more certain than that Christ, known throughout Christendom, in a distinctive and exclusive sense, as God's divine Son, once lived, wrought, taught, and died as a man.

In the events of history and experience there is a sense in which it may be said, and in which it is frequently declared, that Christ may have many subsequent comings to the life of men. But in a sense dis-

tinctive from all this, it is definitely foretold that Christ is again to make a visible advent to the world, following which, and as its consequence, most phenomenal and universal changes will take place in human history. Concerning the fact of two distinct and phenomenal advents of the Son of God to our human world, one of which has already taken place, and the other of which is still to occur, there is in a general sense no disagreement.

So far as "millennialism" is concerned, there are two distinct schools of opinion holding widely divergent convictions as to the relative dates of Christ's final coming, also radically differing views as to the significance of such coming in its relations to the church and kingdom of God in the earth. These schools are designated by the terms "Premillennial" and "Postmillennial." This volume deals only with the former. The term "millennium" literally implies a time period of a thousand years. The one place in the Scriptures where this term is used in the sense of time-measurement is found in Revelation 20. 4–6. Concerning the significance of this term as

used in Revelation, discussion will be reserved for a future chapter.

In a general way, the term "millennium" has passed into use as a sentimental expression of a good time to come in the Christian world.

In this use it is much akin to the term "Messianic Kingdom" as employed in Judaic thought, or the "Golden Age" as in vogue both in pagan and Christian expression. In the sense of a popular optimism for the Christian future of the world the term will hardly urge for itself the necessity of critical discussion. The one book in the Bible where the term is found is dominantly characterized by a tropical expression of symbolism and figure. It seems a violation of the genius of the book itself to undertake its interpretation in forms of literal prose. This violation nowhere appears more positively than in connection with the very term on which millennialists base their doctrine. We have only to literalize this term, and then place it parallel with the decisive trend of New Testament teaching concerning Christ's final coming, to discover that it stands

thus in irreconcilable conflict with the dominant trend of this teaching. In the minds of an overwhelming majority of biblical interpreters the unique and single setting of this term in the book of Revelation decides for it an utterly inadequate and unreliable basis on which to establish a distinctive school of Christian belief.

The following summaries will suffice to familiarize the reader with the fundamental positions of premillennialism:

Webster defines premillennialism as "The doctrine that the second coming of Christ precedes the millennium." I desire, so far as I am able, to give a perfectly fair and just statement of the fundamental positions of premillennialism. This task is not easy, since among writers on premillennialism concerning many of its features there is not a coordinated unity of agreement.

The prevalent view of the early church was that Christ would soon return in glorious power to the earth. Chiliasm, which taught that Christ would reign upon the earth for a thousand years, at the close of which would come the end of the world, appeared early in the Christian

centuries. This doctrine was espoused by several of the eminent church fathers, but it seems never to have reached a controlling creedal hold upon the convictions of the church. The prevailing conception of the chiliastic kingdom was materialistic, sometimes grossly so, and by so much was most largely an inheritance from Jewish thought. Mostly through the powerful teachings and influence of Clement of Alexandria and of Origen, near the close of the second and in the earlier part of the third centuries, chiliasm was rendered a dead letter in the Eastern Church. Later, in the fourth century, Augustine so utterly silenced the doctrine in the Western Church that thereafter for a long period premillennialism was ranked as a heresy.

In the Middle Ages, among some occasional mystical sects, there appeared a revival of millennialism. Following the Reformation, there also arose, especially among Anabaptists, a new advocacy of the doctrine. And so, down to the present, sporadically, here and there, there has sprung up an intense interest in premillennialism. It has been reserved, however,

for our own days to witness, especially in America, a new awakening of premillennialism as is evidenced by a wide and zealous propaganda which now urges its doctrines upon the popular thought.

Desiring, as near as may be, to let premillennialism speak for itself, I quote at length, as follows, from Joseph A. Seiss, who ranks, as I suppose, among the leading American expounders of the doctrine.

(1) Christ Jesus, our adorable Redeemer, is to return to this world in great power and glory, as really and literally as he ascended up from it.

(2) This advent of the Messiah will occur before the general conversion of the world, while the man of sin still continues his abominations, while the earth is yet full of tyranny, war, infidelity, and blasphemy, and consequently before what is called the millennium.

(3) This coming of the Lord will not be to depopulate and annihilate the earth, but to judge, subdue, renew, and bless it.

(4) In the period of his coming he will raise the holy from among the dead, transform the living that are waiting for him,

judge them according to their works, receive them up to himself in the clouds, and establish them in a glorious heavenly kingdom.

(5) Christ will then also break down and destroy all present systems of government in church and state, burn up the great centers and powers of wickedness and usurpation, shake the whole earth with terrific visitations for its sins, and subdue it to his own personal and eternal rule.

(6) During these great and destructive commotions the Jewish race shall be marvelously restored to the land of their fathers, brought to embrace Jesus as their Messiah and King, delivered from their enemies, placed at the head of the nations, and made the agents of unspeakable blessings to the world.

(7) Christ will then reestablish the throne of his father David, exalt it in heavenly glory, make Mount Zion the seat of his divine empire, and, with the glorified saints associated with him in his dominion, reign over the house of Jacob and over the world in a visible, sublime, and heavenly Christocracy for the period of a "thousand years."

(8) During this millennial reign, in which mankind is brought under a new dispensation, Satan is to be bound and the world enjoy its long-expected sabbatic rest.

(9) At the end of this millennial Sabbath the last rebellion shall be quashed, the wicked dead, who shall continue in Hades until that time, shall be raised and judged, and Satan, Death, Hades, and all antagonism to good, delivered over to eternal destruction.

(10) Under these wonderful administrations, the earth is to be entirely recovered from the effects of the fall, the excellence of God's righteous providence vindicated, the whole curse repealed, death swallowed up, and all the inhabitants of the world thenceforward forever restored to more than the full happiness, purity, and glory which Adam forfeited in Eden.[1]

The Catholic Cyclopædia, which must be conceded as a very scholarly authority, describes tersely, as follows, the general attitude of premillennialism: The time will come, it says, when "Christ will return in

[1]For this epitome, as herein given, I am indebted to Dr. Henry C. Sheldon's History of Christian Doctrine.

all his splendor to gather together the just, to annihilate hostile powers, and to found a glorious kingdom on earth for the enjoyment of the highest spiritual and material blessings: he himself will reign as its King, and all the just, including the saints recalled to life, will participate in it. At the close of this kingdom the saints will enter heaven with Christ, while the wicked, who also have been resurrected, will be condemned to eternal damnation."

It is clear that this view, in many essential features, quite excludes or reverses the teachings of postmillennialism. It says in effect that the kingdom of God is not yet in existence in the earth, nor will it be until Christ comes in visible and irresistilbe majesty to enthrone himself as King over men. The preaching of the gospel, as in vogue throughout the Christian centuries, is not designed to convert the world to Christianity, but is simply the testimony of a herald voice to notify all men of the coming kingdom, and thus to make them responsible subjects of the divine judgment. An obedient and elect few will be enrolled among the saints and citizens of the king-

dom, but such, in comparison with the great mass of mankind, will be exceptional, even as a few fortunate passengers rescued from a sinking ship. There is no sufficient moral or spiritual power in the agencies of the gospel, as now employed, either to turn back, or even to arrest, the present toboggan slide of the world toward perdition. In spite of all that the gospel has done, or is now doing, the world will grow worse and worse until Christ comes visibly to establish, with Jerusalem as his headquarters, a new reign over the earth. The essential features of this view will be discussed more fully in subsequent chapters.

Between the advocates and the opponents of this system, as thus presented, there are great and irreconcilable differences. They are divided by the cleavage of a deep and impassable gulf. In passing, however, one fact should be duly emphasized and allowed for, namely, the fundamentally irreconcilable views are held tenaciously by equally sincere and devout Christian minds. Both classes of thinkers worship Christ as Master. Notwithstanding their divergent construction of his

teaching, they equally give him a consecrated and zealous following. The sifting of the controversy, then, upon its merits is not to be, and should not be, construed as an arraignment on either side of personal Christian character. If in the course of this discussion, then, there should appear here and there some caustic characterizations of premillennialism, these are not to be interpreted as an impugnment of the Christian genuineness and sincerity of the many individuals holding this view, but as expressions which, in the judgment of the writer, utter a merited condemnation of the system itself. However, it should be neither minified nor disguised that the two views not only involve vastly different ideals for Christian work in the world but equally different motives and destinies for the kingdom of Christ among men. It is of vital importance, irrespective of the personal following of either, that the real truth should be faithfully disclosed and vindicated. It is under the prompting of such conviction that I am constrained to offer this little volume as a slight contribution to the larger discussion.

## CHAPTER II

## APOCALYPTIC SOURCES

MILLENNIALISM, as a distinct doctrine, and in any of its forms, is based upon a single book, and it may be said upon a single passage in this book, the book familiarly known as the "Revelation by St. John." This book, throughout its structure, is largely characterized by a highly wrought symbolism. As it lifts itself on the landscape of the New Testament it is unique, tempestuous, trumpet-voiced. It presents an astounding prophetic drama the scenes of which are enacted in three worlds—heaven, earth, and hell.

It is to be said that to the biblical historian, until very recently, the development of religious thought through the long transition period between the closing of the Old Testament canon on to the full development of New Testament teaching has presented many exceedingly difficult questions. It is a critical, and often a difficult, art to reproduce the thought processes

which have put their stamp upon a given period. When the historian would trace the connections between one period and a period still later, it is his task to discover the creative thought which has shaped the intellectual life between the two. It has long been recognized among scholars that the New Testament world reveals in Jewish thought many theological views which seem to have been not at all, or at most very little, furnished by the Old Testament itself. Such questions as personal immortality, resurrection from the dead, a future judgment, good and evil spirits without corporeity, a clearly developed doctrine of future punishment for sin—such and many other questions, concerning which the Old Testament was either silent or certainly indefinite, seemed to be commonly domesticated in Jewish thought in the time of Christ. Of course all of these common convictions had a genesis and a history. But to the biblical student, until recently, the history of religious thought for the period between the closing of the Old and the introduction of the New Testament canon has been at best a barren territory.

It is a phenomenal and priceless achievement of modern scholarship that, almost within our own generation, it has unearthed and made available for us a rich literature which furnishes an unbroken connection of religious thought as between the Old and the New Testament periods. One demonstration furnished to us in this knowledge is that the religious habit and style of expression throughout this period was largely apocalyptic. Aside from a few and detached paragraphs here and there, the only apocalyptic writings of the Bible are found in Daniel, written in the second century B. C., and the book of Revelation, produced toward the close of the first century A. D.

If these two books were the only apocalypses in our possession, we might still be a long way from a definite, or satisfactory, solution of their real significance. But the spade of the archæologist and the inquisitorial art of the translator have discovered to us no less than eighteen apocalypses as composed between the time of Daniel and the end of the third century A. D. This is not the place to enter into detailed dis-

cussion of these wonderful discoveries, but a statement of a few facts is pertinent to our purpose. The book of Enoch, well known in New Testament times, and definitely quoted by Jude, is of typical and special interest. This book was recently discovered after having been lost to the world for a period of fifteen hundred years. As it gives practically the best historical memorials of the religious development of Judaism from B. C. 200 to A. D. 100, and especially of those phases of Jewish thought which entered as formative forces into early Christian conceptions, its rediscovery is counted as of the utmost value. This book was counted by many devout minds in the early Christian era as divinely inspired.

Some general characteristics of the apocalyptic literature so rife in the time of Christ, and of the apostolic age, are to be noted:[1]

1. Its delineations are, for the most

[1]For a luminous setting forth of these characteristics, the reader is directed to the elaborate article "Apocalyptic Literature" in Hastings's Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels.

part, of a highly visionary type. The authors are seers who project upon their canvas large, vivid, and vital portraitures. The imagery is often fantastic and unreal as compared with the actual world. Symbolic figures, mixed organisms partaking of the parts and characteristics of different beasts, abound. Mystic numbers, as 7 and 10, are frequently used. The scenes are stormy with conflicts and struggle, with the bitterness of debates and judgment assizes. Throes of earthquake, smoke of torment rising from the abyss, and even the stars of heaven tumbling from their orbits, are parts of the spectacular scenes. Sometimes the writers explain their mystic symbolism: but fully as often the symbolism itself seems used for the very purpose of disguising the meaning of the message.

2. The apocalypses interest themselves mainly in two quite distinctive parts of divine action—the one relating to things ordinarily inscrutable to human thought, and therefore inaccessible to knowledge, as relating to the supramundane world; the other as to God's purposes for the present

world and its inhabitants. The first part has much to do with the activities of angels, both good and bad, also with the secret processes of the great nature-forces, and with the original methods of creation. The second part deals with the entire moral history of the race from the entrance of sin with our first parents, staging the great scenes of Jewish history, then sweeping on to the final eschatology—the Messianic age, the resurrection of the dead, the Judgment Day, and the end of the world. Upon these final and tragic scenes in human history the apocalypses stress themselves with an infinite interest, voicing themselves in a very hyperbole of vivid imagery.

3. The apocalyptic writings are characterized by a marked expansion of angelology. In the biblical narratives angels are spoken of from a very early date, but from the period of the book of Daniel far on into the Christian ages there is a great enlargement of belief of a prevalence in the world of both good and evil spirits. During these ages the mysteries and awful powers of the unknown haunted alike em-

peror and slave. Early Christianity did not divest itself of the superstitious fears, then universally a terror to the pagan world, of vast populations of both good and evil spirits that thronged all the spaces surrounding human habitations. The devil and his angels were terrible realities, prevented from the entire destruction of men only by the ceaseless forewarning of good spirits. It is not easy to measure the force and persistence of the popular belief in ghosts and evil spirits even to late ages in Christian history. As great a man as Martin Luther, throughout his entire lifetime, stood in dread of these satanic forces. To the wholesale peopling of the universe with these invisible personalities, both good and evil, the apocalyptic literature made great contribution.

4. Apocalypses are almost invariably pseudonymously written, the works being usually ascribed to names eminent in previous religious history. Enoch, Moses, Elijah, men divinely translated out of the world, are favorite names for such assignment. Isaiah, Ezra, Baruch, and Daniel, as eminent in the Old Dispensation, are

also names prominent in use. There were many reasons, some of which possibly do not now appear, why the real authors of these writings should have put them forth in the names of eminent men, men themselves long dead when these writings were produced. We know as a matter of history that the custom was common. The canon of literary ethics which prevailed in that old world did not brand this custom as either criminal or disgraceful. For the custom itself, in case of the apocalyptic writers, there were at least two obviously probable motives: The one was to secure the most influential hearing for the message. The apocalyptic writer was always serious. He had a tragic message for a tragic age. If he should think he had a message which Enoch, translated long ago, might naturally have for the present troubled age, then he would feel free to put his prophecy in the mouth of Enoch, with the greater certainty thereby of securing a wide and authoritative hearing; but another, and commanding, reason for the pseudonymous signature was in the fact that the apocalypses were sent forth

as righteous and fiery philippics against the very powers of despotic wickedness. If the writers of these tracts had given their true signatures, they would thereby have exposed themselves to relentless persecution and probably martyrdom. So, of all the apocalypses we know, that of the New Testament is the only one which even appears to bear a true signature.

5. The vital purpose of the apocalypse is to convey a message of optimism, a message of hope and of comfort, to peoples who are in dire necessity, who are passing through drastic crises of persecution and of suffering. "Tracts for Hard Times" is a fitting title which some writer has ascribed to these productions. In any event, they are usually appeals to peoples whose only refuge from present and overwhelming troubles could seem to appear only in an immediate intervention of God's power in their behalf. A supreme lesson to the saint is, that if needs be, it were infinitely better to die in the fiery furnace, or by the headsman's sword, than to betray the faith. The apocalypses deal with most tragic scenes of human experience,

and their messages are forged in the white heats of the most intense emotions that ever can stir the human soul.

6. In the apocalyptic view the present is always a bad age. It is without self-regenerating factors. Left to itself, it will wax worse and worse until the day of its final and complete bankruptcy. The apocalyptic prophecy for betterment looks alone to a divine and catastrophic intervention. In the phraseology of the old prophets there is to come a "great and terrible day of the Lord," a day that shall flame with judgment-fires against the world, a day in which God, or Christ, shall be suddenly revealed in glory and majesty to assert a reign over human affairs. Not Milton, nor Dante, nor any inspired writer ever has penned an epic more startling, more awe-inspiring, than the Revelator's narrative of phenomena that shall characterize God's coming forth, sword in hand, to end a bad and incurable age, and by his almighty fiat to install a new redemption and a new heritage for his chosen people.

7. The Messiah, whether the illustrious

and invincible ruler descended from David, as in Jewish conception, or the glorified Christ, is the central and potent figure in the apocalyptic vision. He by his own might and majesty is to bring in the prophetic hope.

8. The conception of a general Judgment Day was probably a development from an expression often on the lips of the old prophets—"The Day of the Lord." But the impressiveness of the judgment scene, as set forth in apocalyptic teaching, is something passing all ordinary imagination. It is a day in which the wickedness of God's enemies, whether of devils, evil angels, or men, will be most spectacularly exposed. God, the Ancient of Days, high enthroned, and surrounded by myriads of angels, will pronounce irrevocable sentence against all evildoers throughout the universe. The wicked of all classes shall be utterly overthrown, not annihilated, but doomed to a perpetually wretched existence. In the apocalyptic picture generally the doom of God's enemies is drastic, hopeless, final, a doom of suffering without sympathy and without help. Of course, as

over against the doom of the wicked, the righteous, upon resurrection, are rewarded with eternal life. The character of this life is not always definitely described. Sometimes it is looked upon as a prolonged bodily life. Again, it is presented as a superior kind of life in another world.

9. A new world-order is to be installed under the reign of the Messiah. The present world, which has been defiled by rebellion and sin against God, will violently pass away. The present material heavens and earth will be destroyed, and in their place will come a new heavens and a new earth in which shall dwell righteousness.

Such are some of the characteristics of apocalyptic writings which sprang up numerously during a period of about four hundred years, a period to which the advent of Christ was historically central. A review of this literature prepares us to appreciate the views of eschatology which were so common to Jewish thought at the time of Christ. It must be borne in mind that the early Christian views of last things were direct importations from Jewish thought. One cannot, for instance,

study Christ's own description of the last judgment, the quenchless fires of Gehenna, the parable of Dives and Lazarus, the picture of the world's final ending, without the impression that he was addressing these vivid descriptions to a popular mind already familiar with their imagery. However in all this we may finally interpret Christ, there seems little room to doubt that whenever he spoke, as he did rarely, of his own Messiahship; when he discoursed on final things; when he spoke, as he did frequently, of his own future kingdom—on all these things he invariably spoke in terms and figures of apocalyptic thought already domesticated in the common mind.

Of the abundant apocalyptic literature which we have noted, only two products finally found their way into the biblical canon—the book of Daniel and the book of Revelation. It is due to remember, however, that other of these apocalypses were held as inspired and sacred by many devout Jews. In any event, we need to have in view the entire background of this literature in order to a just appreciation

of both Jewish and Christian apocalyptic thought. It must be duly stressed that the eschatology prevalent in the time of Christ was a Jewish rather than a Christian product.

Turning our thought specifically to the "Revelation of St. John," the one apocalyptic book of the New Testament, we can but be impressed that it is intensely characterized by the kind of vision, symbolism, and mystery so common to the apocalyptic literature in general. This book is now doubtless better understood than ever before since its original writing. It is thought by some scholars that there are figures in it of Babylonish origin. There are doubtless several references in it to the Book of Enoch. But, whatever may be said concerning these sources, the sources of the book as a whole make it an Old Testament product. Westcott and Hort have told us that in the entire four hundred and four verses of the Apocalypse, there are about two hundred and sixty-five which contain Old Testament language, and about five hundred and fifty references are made in them to Old

Testament passages. There are forty-five references alone to the book of Daniel. The mind of the author was saturated through and through with Old Testament fact and symbolism. In this sense the book is not original. Its sources and imagery are all taken from previously prepared material. It must be emphasized, however, that the Revelator had a marked originality of his own. He treats with great independence and freedom the material which he works into his structure. He unhesitatingly adapts all previous facts and figures to the diagram of his own thought. His work as a whole is a matchless mosaic arranged with consummate artistic power. While the scholar will tell us that the writer of Revelation was not an expert in Greek grammar, yet it must be conceded that he was a very prodigy in dramatic power.

This Apocalypse was probably written in the reign of Domitian; it also probably reflects the previous atrocities committed against Christians under Nero. Domitian installed himself as a deity-emperor, demanding worship from all his subjects.

This assumption could but be regarded by the Christians as the extreme of blasphemy and wickedness. It precipitated an issue of most vital character as between a supreme loyalty due to Jesus Christ and the false and blasphemous claims made by a wicked ruler. The penalty of disobedience to the claims of the emperor might be imprisonment or death. On account of his outspoken loyalty to Christ, the writer of Revelation himself was doubtless a fellow sufferer with the saints. The very hour was tragic. The faith and courage of Christians were subjected to severest strain. They needed a very trumpet voice from heaven to inspire them with courage and endurance. The vision of the Revelator was filled with the tragedy and crash of a present crisis. He was not at all thinking of events so far away as the twentieth century of the Christian era. The mightiest concrete power on earth had arraigned itself against the sovereignty of Jesus Christ. The scourge of persecution, of the dungeon, and of death was wielded for the very destruction of Christianity from the earth. The Revelator, as

the rallyer and inspirer of Christian loyalty, could be content with no mild measures. It was an hour for action, intense action. The divinest destinies were in the balance. So, his message comes uttering itself in trumpet voices, in terms that flame as with the very lightnings of Sinai. Under a matchless symbolism he proclaims the deific and absolute sovereignty of the glorified Christ. Christ is able to break the last seal from the book of mystery. He can chain the very prince of evil powers, and cast him helpless into the pit. Even Rome, the boasted mistress of the world, the arch prostitute that had debauched mankind, that had made the nations drunken with the wine of her fornication, he will slay as an evil beast. No power can stand against him. As against all opposition, he can work sure deliverance for his people. The present persecution is a passing storm. But the saints who continue true to Christ he will lead forth to a heritage of victory, of security, of everlasting joy and blessedness, where he will be their God, and they shall be his people, and they shall go no more out

from his presence for evermore. And this was the message of the Apocalypse of Saint John. It was staged amid the scenery of world-tragedies. It was set in coloring as vivid as the rainbow. Hyperbole, of the first Oriental order, was freely used to send the stir and drive of the message into the hearts of those for whom it was spoken. One could no more reduce the Revelation of Saint John to literal, cold, and unemotional prose than he could pluck Orion from the constellations of the night.

Now, throughout the remainder of our discussion one fact never to be lost sight of is that upon a short paragraph of three verses taken from this book of Revelation, a book confessedly of highly wrought symbolism and mystery, is based the literal doctrine of a millennium, a period through which Christ and his saints, at some time still dating in the future, shall physically reign for a thousand years upon the earth.

## CHAPTER III

## THE JUDGMENT OF HISTORY

We have noted with interest the source on which a literal doctrine of a millennium is founded. Rationally, what is to be said, what conclusion is to be reached, on so marked a doctrine as thus educed? We are now living in the twentieth century of the Christian era. According to a very zealous, though limited, propaganda of the present, the millennium is still in the future. It may come in this twentieth, or perhaps not until some later, century. In any event, it cannot occur until at least many centuries have elapsed since the writing of the original prophecy. How are we to reconcile the millennial assumption with reference to the fulfillment of this prophecy with the frequent and repeated declarations of the Revelator himself? He is careful to speak of his prediction as something of immediate fulfillment.

In his earlier sentences he pronounces a blessing upon those who hear and heed his words, "for the time is at hand." To the angel of the church in Philadelphia he makes Christ say: "Behold, I come quickly; hold fast that which thou hast, that no man take thy crown." In his closing paragraphs he says: "The Lord God of the holy prophets sent his angel to show unto his servant the things which must shortly be done." Then he records God as saying "Behold, I come quickly: blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book." As if in eager expectation of the immediate coming of Christ, he says: "Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book"—as though it would not be worth while—"for the time is at hand." And again: "Behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give to every man according as his work shall be." The final word which he puts into the lips of Christ is this: "Surely, I come quickly. Amen." To this the Revelator himself responds: "Even, so, come, Lord Jesus." Surely, nothing could seem clearer than that the Revelator was discoursing upon

events which he regarded as of immediate fulfillment.

We have seen, what seems to us fully convincing, that John's writing was called forth by a great crisis of persecution, the tragic scenes of which were raging around him at the very time in which he wrote. That the Revelator apparently should have been silent concerning the sorrows and tribulations of the saints in this crisis—sorrows and tribulations of which he himself doubtless was an eyewitness and a sharer—and that he should have given himself in such an hour to the writing of a prophecy, the chief message of which was not for his fellow sufferers of the time, but for men twenty or more centuries away—this is an assumption which both logically and psychologically must be challenged as both irrational and inexplicable. This is a kind of interpretation which can be adopted and believed only by the hard-put-to-it special pleader. It is something to strike the unprejudiced mind as both preposterous and absurd. We may not juggle with our common sense. In the first place, it is a gross violation of all sound canons of

linguistic interpretation to force a literal construction upon allegorical or highly colored symbolic statements. In the second place, if this literalizing method should be insisted upon as applied to the single passage found alone in the book of Revelation, it could only yield a result clearly and violently in conflict with other plain and direct eschatological teachings of the New Testament. If we treat the term "thousand years" in the book of Revelation as we are rationally compelled to treat many other of its figurative expressions, and instead of considering it as a time measurement, construe it as representing the idea of "completeness," we shall go far in relieving ourselves from an absurdity of interpretation.

We are bound to pay some respect to the larger consensus of Christian thought. When all is said, it remains that the premillennial construction of the passage in question has, on the whole, made very little impression upon the sane thought of the church. Augustine was, perhaps, the mightiest of the church Fathers. He was a philosopher of the first rank. No man,

aside from Saint Paul, even if we should make him an exception, ever so influenced the theological thought of the ages. As early as the fifth century Augustine smote hip and thigh, well nigh to its death, the entire structure of premillennialism. Calvin was one of the most vigorous thinkers who ever stood on two feet. His logic had in it the quality of the Day of Judgment. He had no use for premillennialism. Not so much was known in his day about the Apocalypse as now. It is to be noted, however, that in his biblical comments, he gave the book of Revelation a wide berth. Dr. Frank C. Porter, late professor of biblical literature in Yale University, speaks of the special three verses in Revetion as "the fateful verses which have produced one of the least useful chapters in the long history of Christian thought." William Newton Clarke, one of the most brilliant and spiritually discerning of modern theologians, is convinced that the doctrine of millennialism has no proper biblical standing whatsoever. Such testimony might be well-nigh indefinitely multiplied. Among recent luminous writings on this

subject, and all in convincing refutation of premillennialism, are works by Drs. George P. Eckman, Shirley Jackson Case, and James H. Snowden.

A long-range view of Christian thought, while revealing many sporadic outbreaks of millennialism, shows clearly that the steady and controlling trend of the church has moved on independently of, and little influenced by, the special teachings of the cult. Dr. C. A. Briggs, a most eminent authority, as quoted by Professor James H. Snowden, says: "We find chiliasm"—millennialism—"in a few eminent men of the first half"—of the third—"century, all influenced by extra-biblical traditions from Asia Minor; but they made it prominent only to insure its overthrow—for the mass of writers, as well as churches, speaking through their local assemblies, bishops, and patriarchs, either show an entirely different conception of eschatology, or else, as in the great churches of Rome, Alexandria, and Asia Minor, they condemn the heresy; so that before the first Ecumenical Council of Nice, chiliasm had been virtually suppressed in all parts of the Christian

Church, and no one of that most august assembly of Christendom from all parts of the church has ever, so far as we know, been charged with the slightest taint of millenarianism."

Dr. Briggs also, in an elaborate treatment of the historic creeds of the early church, clearly shows that they are none of them shaped by millennialistic doctrines. They all teach the simultaneous resurrection of the wicked with the righteous, thereby excluding a very foundation of premillennialism. The same statement, in effect, may also be asserted concerning the great creeds of modern Protestantism.

It cannot be said, however, that millennialism is an extinct faith. Like an underground water-course that comes to the surface here and there, millennialism has intermittently shown itself at various periods through the centuries of Christian history. Its phenomena, while much the same at all times, have been excited into activity from time to time by varying causes. However few its numbers, it is always supported by an intense following. Its creed, in general, appeals more to the

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emotions than to reason, is made far more effective through a colored rhetoric than by the invincibilities of a sound logic. Among its adherents there would seem an undue proportion of persons whose credulity is far in excess of their ability to clearly discriminate between truth and error. But credulity and fanaticism are so akin as to be frequently found in close association. For instance, at different times during the nineteenth century there were no less than nine different sporadic outbreaks, and in widely sundered times and communities, of intense social excitement growing out of the expectation, in each case, of Christ's second appearing at given dates as respectively designated. Time and again people have clothed themselves in pure white, have gathered at the brinks of rivers, and have waited with outstretched hands and uplifted vision for the immediate coming of the Lord in the clouds of heaven. In support of views of which such phenomena have been a too frequent and pathetic fruitage several Adventist denominations have been founded, and are still maintained.

A historic cataclysm seems sure to impart a new impulse to premillennialism. It is accepted as a portent which precedes and forewarns the violent shaking of the earth, and the ending of the present order of human history. It is in keeping with this fact that the recent unpredecented world-war has evoked a marked revival among the people of this faith by inciting a new expectation of the imminent coming of Christ for the ending of the world. There have been some periods in the history of premillennialism marked by most unrestrained and fanatical excitement; but there probably never was in America a period marked by a more systematic, persistent, and even audacious propaganda of this faith, than is being widely urged at the present time. "Bible Conferences," numerous and widely distributed over the country, are being frequently conducted as free schools of the faith. These conferences are conducted by the most expert teachers and lecturers that can be imported for the purpose. It is a common rumor that for the support of this movement large endowments of money have been secured. The

appeal is made to the masses of Christians in every community, and in many cases people are drawn under the influence of these meetings from the surrounding churches. The phenomena are not new. As in former cases, though perhaps now on a somewhat different scale, high expectations will be raised, the most startling predictions uttered, and many, some in ecstasy, some in fear, will look for the imminent and phenomenal coming of the Lord.

The movement merits counteraction. If it be fundamentally false, it may be productive of serious damage. Its propaganda has behind it the soul of earnest leadership. The earnest agitator, often misled and misleading, is a person not always to be treated with indifference. If sincere, he needs instruction and persuasion. If vicious, he needs to feel the majesty of truth against which he arrays himself. Premillennialism is not a cult to be underestimated. The evident awaking of scholarly thought in these very days in refutation of premillennial positions is evidence itself of a growing conviction that the movement

no longer should be allowed to pass unchallenged. Its danger, however, is not at all that it shall in any measure unsettle, or even modify, the present solid consensus of Christian scholarship concerning its teachings. Its real danger is the hold which as a propaganda it may, by its persistent and plausible methods, secure upon the unlettered and good people of the Christian churches. It is this menace which should be zealously counteracted.

Fully allowing for all present reenforcements and renewed activities of the movement, there is no sort of danger of the sane scholarship of the church being seriously invaded by its claims. Its methods are in too exaggerated and gross violations of established creedal truth, too mechanical, too illogical, to make it at all possible that it should in any way disturb the assured solidity already reached by critical Christian thought. In real scholarship premillennialism will always prove a negligible quantity. Professor James H. Snowden, in a recent article in the Biblical World, tells us that in order to find out the attitude of biblical scholarship on the question, he

applied for, and obtained official information on this point from twenty-seven leading theological seminaries in eight denominations, with the result that "out of the two hundred and thirty-six members of the faculties of these theological seminaries only eight are premillennialists." As showing the attitude of real scholarship in the situation, no more significant demonstration could be asked than this. The scholarship of the church on the question is sound, and scholarship alone, as rightfully belongs to its province, will finally and triumphantly close the debate.

Yet, a remarkable anomaly in the history of thought has well-nigh continuously repeated itself in the persistent reiteration, straight in the face of all historic teaching to the contrary, of the imminent coming of Christ to end the present order of world-life. All through the centuries, from the days of Ignatius of Antioch to these later days of Pastor Russell, the premillennial hope, in some periods more pronounced, in some less so, has been in one form or another revived. In many instances and locations, intense popular interest has been

awakened, and definite dates set for the physical reappearing of Christ. But in every case, without the shadow of an exception, history has rebuked this enthusiasm, and has dealt with the date-makers in terms of stern and inflexible negation. After history, and in so many cases, has uniformly falsified all predictions as to the time of Christ's renewed bodily appearance in the world, it seems nothing less than an enigma that any man, or set of men, laying claim to ordinary intelligence, should still be found willing to lend support to this inglorious succession of false prophecies.

There is one supreme interpreter to which all open-minded thinkers will pay at least respectful attention—and this is History. It is to be admitted that in the early church there was a general and eager expectation of Christ's near return to the world. History declares with definiteness and emphasis that, in the sense in which this advent was expected, it was a mistaken view. Even Saint Paul himself outlived in his own case this view. When he wrote his first letter to the Thessalonians, he apparently shared the conviction that

he himself would be alive on the earth at his Lord's appearing. Years later, when he wrote his letters to Timothy, he seemed fully to anticipate that he would die a martyr's death. If history teaches anything, it is that God's calendar of final events is not in the slightest measure regulated or controlled by any human jugglery of numerals. It may be accepted as axiomatic and indubitable, whatever temporary clamor or enthusiasm may cry out to the contrary, that any philosophy or theology which does not bear the final approval of history, is a system of thought not to be trusted. In the light of this infallible principle, a few of the succeeding chapters will be devoted to a discussion of some rational objections against the positions of premillennialism.

## CHAPTER IV

## UNSCIENTIFIC USE OF SCRIPTURE

The term "unscientific" in the title to this chapter is not used in any occult sense. It is simply intended to convey the idea of an unnatural, abnormal, and unjustifiable method in the use of the Scriptures. The premillennialist school insistently demands a literal interpretation of the Bible. A strict and universal application of literalism, however, to biblical interpretation has been found not only exceedingly difficult but impossible. The Bible is an Oriental book. The Occidental mind in its methods is much less imaginative than the Oriental mind. But even the more prosy Western thought employs for its expression all kinds of figurative speech —myth, legend, fable, parable, hyperbole, symbolism. All shades of poetical imagery have a legitimate and recognized function in our living literature and speech. But if all this is true in Occidental thought, it

proves immeasurably more so when we traverse the realm of Oriental expression. The Oriental mind thinks in pictures and in symbols. In the very nature of the case, it is not only utterably impracticable, but its attempt is absurd, to reduce to literal prose all the statements of the Bible.

All this is infinitely removed from arraignment of the sanity of Scripture expression. The Bible does not always mean what an obsession for plain prose construction would call for. In its most symbolic utterance, however, it does convey its intended meaning to discerning insight. Under the garb of poetry and symbol it often conveys to us its intended message with far greater charm and vividness than would be pssoible in any setting of plain and naked prose.

The history of biblical interpretation discloses two extremes of method—the allegorical and the literal—each of which is far removed from the normal line. For centuries many of the church Fathers surrendered themselves to the allegorical method. Prepossessed by their acquired philosophy and theology, they found it

impossible to reconcile the Scriptures, as literally construed, to their beliefs. As a consequence they resorted to methods of allegorical interpretation, forcing the Scriptures to mean anything that might be called for as harmonizing with their preconceived convictions. The extremes to which this method carried really great minds are an enigma and a marvel in the history of thought. Such masters as Origen, Athanasius, and even Augustine, interpreted the Scriptures by methods as fantastic and absurd as could well enter into the most childish imagination. As tested by methods of modern inductive and scientific criticism, their allegorical philosophy was so largely a tissue of unreality as to give us wonder how any sane, much less really great, minds could ever have espoused it. Yet this method of interpretation was so well-nigh universal and controlling as, down to a period just preceding the Reformation, to rest like a thick and obscuring cloud over the entire Scriptures. Dr. George H. Gilbert, in his illuminating book, The Interpretation of the Bible, declares that in the mediæval

church the allegorical methods had far more influence than the entire teachings of Christ and his apostles. It was this obscuration that caused Luther to declare that the reading of the Bible by the glossings of the Fathers is as "when one strains milk through a coal-sack."

Allegorism is the extreme opposite of literalism. Neither method can be made to apply on all-fours to Scripture interpretation. Many of the most pregnant passages of both the Old and New Testaments cannot by any possibility be subjected to a geometrical literalism. On this principle Christ himself said many impossible things. How about a camel passing through the "eye of a needle"? It may be often exceedingly difficult, and this is the emphasis of the saying, but it is not impossible that a rich man may enter the kingdom of heaven. Christ requires of no man that he shall literally "hate his father and his mother." But if it really comes to the crisis of choice as to whether a man shall cleave to Christ or to his parents, he must not hesitate for a moment as between the two. These and many other statements

falling from the lips of Christ, are simply expressions of a supreme emphasis upon the moral and spiritual requirements of his kingdom. These expressions are all Orientalisms which it would be obviously absurd to translate unmodified into terms of universal Christian practice.

The premillennial school itself seems to have encountered such practical difficulty in this relation as to have developed, whether consciously or otherwise, a selective method of Scripture interpretation. The expounders of this school seem very generally to emphasize, wherever found, such passages of Scripture as would seem to lend confirmation to their views, while at the same time they appear utterly oblivious to many strong passages which stand in clear opposition to their tenets. The Master's great and final commission, for instance, as recorded in Matt. 28. 18–20, seems for the most part to be singularly overlooked by the expositors of premillennialism. In this commission Christ distinctly directs his disciples to go immediately into all the world for the purpose of evangelizing—not simply as a declara-

tion or testimony of the gospel to the world—all nations, to baptize them in the name of the Holy Trinity, and to teach them as practical Christians to observe all things which he had commanded, and he adds the promise that he will be continually with them even to the very end of the world. It is rationally impossible to read premillennialism into this commission. Yet this is one of the most significant, imperative, and all-inclusive commands to the church that ever fell from the lips of Christ.

Another method common to premillennial writers, and seemingly essential to the plausibilities of their case, is to ransack the Scriptures for proof-texts in support of their doctrines. It appears to make little or no difference where a given text is found, or what its connections, if it contains any phraseology or suggestion which may be construed in support of their views. With a hunger for support that seems incapable of critical discrimination they seize and segregate, as arrested innocent parties, passages in all the biblical writings, from Genesis to Revelation,

which are eagerly construed in support of their doctrines. In various and swollen lists of such passages, as appearing here and there, the plain misappropriation, misconstruction, and false exegesis of great numbers of these passages are such as to stir in the mind of the sane and unprejudiced biblical student a sense of revolt. One wonders at once how minds both honest and intelligent ever can come under the lure of such sophistical pleading.

This method of miscellaneous use of texts in support of a given doctrine, or in the construction of a theological system, is now well-nigh universally discarded in approved biblical scholarship. It is a kind of method by which, if it were valid, almost any fad espoused by religious fanaticism could be proven. It is a method to be repudiated as both unsound and unsafe for use in any valid theological construction.

Premillennialism seems to be very little interested concerning either the history or lessons growing out of the first coming of Christ. The philosophy of this attitude is obvious. The real kingdom of Christ has

not yet arrived. It will not even be installed until Christ at some future coming shall set up his visible reign in the earth—a reign which shall be signalized by every token of majesty, of power, and authority. Then will follow the millennium, during which the nations shall be subject to Christ's irresistible rule. The period, however prolonged, between Christ's first and second coming is, at best, little more than a dispensation of advertising, or witnessing, to the peoples of the earth the fact of the coming kingdom. The chief purpose of such witnessing would seem to be to awaken in the minds of men a sense of responsibility, and therefore of accountability, for repentance and obedience toward God. But as a spiritual scheme of race restoration, the present dispensation is a failure. A few here and there, exceptional cases, heeding the testimony of the gospel, will repent and believe, thus being included among those who at the Lord's coming will be caught up to meet him in the air; or, if they have previously died, to have part in the first resurrection. The world, however, as a whole will wax

worse and worse, more and more hopeless, to the very end of the present period.

Premillennialism, postponing the real effectiveness of Christ's reign over the world until his majestic second coming, is under a logical necessity of emphasizing as little as possible the present spiritual order. I do not say that devout premillennialists attach no importance to the present gospel dispensation. But, at best, this dispensation is but a twilight preparation as compared with the glory which shall burst upon the world in the millennial morning. The premillennial mind revels in the anticipated glory of Christ's visible and resistless reign in the earth. Under this obsession, as under an eclipse, all adequate perspective and vision of the real significance of the present spiritual order of the world seem hidden from sight.

It is this miseducation which accounts for a most anachronistic construction in connection with Old Testament prophecy. That the highest prophetic utterance abounds in glowing Messianic predictions is in clearest evidence. Whatever else may be said concerning it, the elect Hebrew

mind was prophetic in quality. It was a mind luminous and inspired with a sublime idealism. In its perspective the glory of the Davidic reign was itself but a type and prophecy of a far more enduring and exceedingly glorious era which somewhere awaited Israel's future. The Hebrew mind, however, including the noblest of the prophets, always clung to the coming Messianic glory as something to be disclosed and to be realized upon the earth itself. The idea of a transcendent heavenly and spiritual kingdom as distinctly separated ultimately from the earth was one which never came clearly into the older Jewish thought. It is a fact profoundly significant that Jesus Christ himself presents alone the most ideal embodiment of the noblest Messianic prophecy. But it still remains seriously to ask how far, for instance, did Isaiah foresee in his own vision the real Jesus of Nazareth? Isaiah's idealism for the future was both highly ethical and spiritually glorious. In his description of the "Suffering Servant" he would seem almost to have drawn to the mirror the features of Christ's humilia-

tion. But, if we place Isaiah's Messianic visions upon the one hand, and the historic Christ of the New Testament upon the other, it will require something far other than a literalistic interpretation of Scripture to make the one fit into the other. Isaiah was moved by the loftiest inspirations of prophetic idealism; but it is more than doubtful whether the photographic character of the Jesus of the New Testament ever rested clearly in his vision. In any event, it is perfectly clear that when Jesus of Nazareth was fulfilling his matchless ministry under their very eyes, the Jerusalem Jews did not place upon him the robes of Isaiah's vision.

But aside entirely from the question as to whether the prophetic vision embraced clearly and distinctly the historic Christ, there is not the slightest evidence that the Messianic predictions were intended to apply to the second rather than to the first coming of our Lord. It may be questioned whether in all the history of critical construction there is a more radical break with consistent interpretation than comes to the front in the premillennial theory of

Old Testament prophecy. For this theory, the reign of Christ upon the earth is so transcendent, of such supreme consequence, as to have given birth to the preposterous invention of transferring the significance of the great body of Old Testament Messianic prophecy to a period following the second advent of Christ. This kind of construction, of course, is fatally beset by irreducible and insuperable historic obstacles. The principles on which such a theory could be justified might be used in support of almost any kind of conspiracy against the sanity of the race. To say nothing about its transparent inconsistencies, it possesses at least the merits of an amazing audacity.

Now, concerning all these methods of premillennial treatment of Old Testament prophecy, it ought to be enough to call attention to the fact that they belong to a vogue thoroughly superseded in the most approved methods of biblical study. The Bible contains sixty-six distinct publications. The varying dates of these publications range approximately over a period of a thousand years. Each book has its

own distinct cause for existence. Each has its historic background and environment. The books vary greatly in literary and moral values, now reflecting the limited knowledge and varying ethical judgments of primitive peoples, and again rising to the most luminous levels of highest inspiration. The books in their due order, and in their entire sweep, reveal a progressive and ever-enlarging disclosure of God's methods and purposes for the world, more especially through the channel of Hebrew history. Whatever else may be said about them, however divine their mission, these books have come into our possession as a body of literature. As such they have a history. It is legitimate for scholarship, by all means at its disposal, reverently to possess itself of all the facts of this history. Divested of the deadly pall of unreasoning prejudice, no proposition can be more sane than this. It is self-evident that the books themselves cannot be best understood and appreciated without the most perfect knowledge of their histories. The truly scientific way of studying the Bible is to investigate entire

books at a time, and to study them so far as possible in the light of the environment in which and of the purposes for which they respectively were written. It is not always true that the same terms as used in different books mean the same things. We always must be careful not to read into any of the statements a modern meaning which could not possibly have existed in the minds of the original writers. We must in every case, so far as possible—and generally it is quite possible—seek to know just what the writer means by the words he uses. We can have a correct and most profitable understanding of the Bible only in just the measure in which it speaks to us its own original meaning. But in proportion as this result is realized nothing will be clearer than that the method of ransacking the entire Bible for proof-texts by which to establish theological preconceptions, is both an illogical and false method. Yet it is a method which immemorially has been fruitful in introducing most unfortunate perversions and abuses into Bible uses.

The unity of the Bible is not so much

literary as moral. The books do not all teach the same thing. The real unity and combined power of these books are to be found in the perfect mosaic which, with all their varying qualities, they furnish in their superlative record of God's one and progressive revelation of himself to the human world. So far as the Bible is concerned, the grave charge to be made against premillennialism is that its treatment of the Scriptures is arbitrary and not scientific. Its doctrines can be made even plausible only by methods of special pleading and special constructions. For its special purposes it has turned the Bible into a miscellaneous textbook. By this method, if accepted without thought, without protest, almost any theory, however absurd, could find plausible support.

## CHAPTER V

## PREMILLENNIALISM JEWISH: NOT CHRISTIAN

The Old Testament as a historic record of God's processes of preparation for the coming spiritual kingdom of his Son can be neither minified nor displaced. It will be forever exalted and glorified as an essential record of God's revelation of himself to mankind. No other ancient religious literature, the New Testament, of course, excepted, however great its significance, is worthy to be classed with the Old Testament. Measured by its distinctive purpose, no human praise or appreciation can overmatch the merits of its record. But we may justly remember that in estimating the Old Testament we are moving always in a realm of types, shadows, codes, sacrifices, ritual, song, prophecy, much of which was crudely rudimental, most of which was temporary, all of which was preparatory to a fuller

revelation. The Old Testament was a pioneer and a guide through long and shadowed ages, across wide and unsurveyed territories of desert and wilderness, to the gateways of an immeasurably higher and abiding dispensation for the world which was to be disclosed with the advent of Christ. What the foundation is to the superstructure, Judaism was to Christianity. This material figure, however, does not and cannot express the vital relationships of the Judaic and Christian dispensations to each other. In the sense that the one was purely provisional and preparatory, the other enduring and final; that the one was the historic matrix, the other the final and adequate disclosure of God's spiritual and redemptive purposes for the race—in this sense Christianity may be declared to have been born of Judaism. Without, however, the revelation of which the New Testament gives us the record, had Christ never come, had the Holy Spirit as Christ's interpreter and revealer to the world not been specially given to attest and confirm Christ's redemptive advent, then, in such case, the

Old Testament would have fallen into historic thought as a system both abortive and helpless. The entire significance of the Old Testament for abiding spiritual and moral values, or as a religion for humanity, has its emphasis and interpretation supremely in the revelation of Jesus Christ. Judaism represents the preparatory and the superseded; Christianity the final and ever-developing revelation of God's spiritual administration for the human world.

It is a distinctive and abiding glory of the Hebrew revelation that the great prophets luminously and authoritatively emphasized ethical and spiritual character as a supreme condition of enjoying Jehovah's favor. The vision of a righteous monotheism grew in clearness with the development of the prophetic school. The majesty, glory, and power of the righteous and sovereign God, the universality of his sway in the affairs of men, as set forth by Isaiah and Jeremiah, will forever hold a foremost place among the sublime chapters of religious literature. The historic tragedy is that Judaism in its controlling

thought and policies, notwithstanding the high inspirations of its great prophets, never caught the vision of the solely moral and spiritual significance of the Messianic reign. Their horizon of the kingdom was earthly. The high ideals of the prophetic era went under eclipse. From the days of Ezekiel, and ever after, ritual, priest, and altar held the dominant place in Jewish thought and worship. The Judaic conception of the Messianic kingdom grew thoroughly materialistic. The Messiah was to be an earthly sovereign. The Hebrew people were to be his favored subjects, and through him they were to be the rulers of the nations. The kingdom was to be one of unprecedented glory and authority, highly moral perhaps, but yet earthly in its appointments and manifestations. In the meantime and always the highest obligation of the devout Jew was to fulfill the rites which his ritual enjoined.

This thorough preoccupation with, this intense and all-persuasive obsession of, a Messianic materialistic kingdom in the earth, fully possessed the Jewish mind when Christ made his advent in Bethle-

hem. Christ, himself, in all the schooling of his disciples, constantly encountered this obsession. It is to be admitted, I think, that Christ, through all his ministry, was much of an enigma to his disciples. By his ineffable charm, by the marvels of his power, he commanded their wondering admiration and loyalty. But in his lifetime they never knew quite what to make of him. It is certain that to the very last they looked upon him as the one who should secure a temporal dominion for Israel. Down to the very scene of the cross these disciples had a most imperfect apprehension of the spiritual significance of their Master's mission. To the very close they were scheming among themselves for places and honors of political preferment in the kingdom which they believed he was about to establish. The ambitious mother of James and John personally besought Christ to give to her two sons the places of chief honor, the one to be placed upon his left, the other upon his right hand, when he should come into his kingdom. The other disciples, hearing of this, were greatly offended against the two,

not because they themselves had any better ideals, but because they were equally politically ambitious, and felt that James and John, by coming earlier upon the scene, had thus sought to forestall their own chances.

For these same disciples not even Pentecost, with all its spiritual illumination, was sufficient to correct and to eradicate this obsession. For a long time, at least, the original disciples maintained for themselves headquarters at Jerusalem. Ceremonially, they were more Jewish than Christian. Peter was partially emancipated by a miraculous vision, but even so his deep-rooted Jewish training so far controlled his thought and action that Paul found it necessary to rebuke and to withstand him face to face. Saint Paul, the latest installed of the apostles, was the first of them all to apprehend that the distinctive types and usages of Judaism were to be displaced and superseded by the genius of Christianity. All through his great missionary career he was perpetually hounded by teachers who insidiously sought by a reversion to Judaizing ceremonial and method to rob his converts

of their Christian freedom. Such was the persistence of the Jewish obsession. Saint Paul never will be overestimated. To him almost alone was due the rescuing of Christianity itself from becoming a mere Judaizing sect. If such had been its election, it would long since, so far as we can now see, have perished from the earth. Saint Paul was the first of the great Christian teachers to give universal application to all races of the gospel of redemption through Jesus Christ.

Nothing could be plainer than Saint Paul's reiterated teaching of the utter superseding by Christianity of Jewish law and ceremonial. To him Christianity was the spiritual fulfillment of what at best in Jewish ritual was but material type and foreshadowing. In the interest of Christian freedom from the bondage of Jewish usage he not only withstood Peter but as well the entire apostolic company at Jerusalem, forcing upon them the correctness of his view and securing their formal indorsement of the same. The masterful Epistle to the Romans turns largely upon the fact that the sinner is not and cannot

be saved by the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his only Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." To the Corinthians Paul represents himself as the "minister of a new testament," or covenant, which ministers not after the Jewish law, the letter which killeth, but which worketh for the spirit of the believer in Jesus Christ life and liberty. In the Galatian church, founded by Paul, insidious Judaizing teachers had impressed the converts with the necessity of conformity to Jewish usages. Paul's letter to this church is not only a philippic of denunciation against these false teachers, but it utters a distinct disavowal and renunciation of Jewish ceremonialism as having no place in the Christian life. He says: "O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set

forth, crucified among you?" He brands the Jewish views and usages to which these converts had turned back as "weak and beggarly elements," the embracing of which would subject the man once made free in Jesus Christ to renewed spiritual bondage. He says: "If ye are led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law." The Epistle to the Hebrews is distinctively devoted to the purpose of showing that in Christ Jewish ordinances are not only fulfilled, but superseded. Indeed, the New Testament itself is largely a psychological history of the conflict between Jewish traditionalism and the principle of spiritual freedom in Christ. It is the picture of a great arena in which is enacted one of the most decisive conflicts in the spiritual history of mankind.

It would seem an anomaly, a very anachronism of thought that any mind in this twentieth century, professing to live near the heart of the New Testament, should retrovert to the adoption for professed Christian purposes of Old Testament ceremonial and usages. But this is the mental attitude which premillennialism openly assumes for itself. I do not

assert that in this respect all premillennialists hold identical views. I deem it fair, however, to judge of the system by the declarations of its chief exponents. It is certain that a pronounced majority of premillennial writers lay great emphasis upon the restoration of Old Testament usages which, in their view, are to be reinstalled in the millennial kingdom.

Since the writing, for the most part, of this manuscript, the very illuminating volume The Coming of the Lord, by Dr. James H. Snowden, has come to my hand. I herewith quote from him a paragraph most pertinent to the phase now before us. He says: "Who would ever have expected that in the face of all this teaching and of these earnest efforts to rid the Christian Church of these old ordinances that had served their day as the withered and empty husk has served the corn, there would arise among believers in later times a school of interpreters who would teach that the whole Mosaic system, with its temple and central seat of worship and its seasons and feasts and sacrifices, its passover and unleavened bread, its daily peace

offerings and bloody burnt-offerings and sin-offerings, its altar streaming with blood and its smoke of incense, was to be restored in Jerusalem after the second coming of Christ? Who could have believed this incredible thing? And yet this very thing has come to pass and now is."

It is, as already noted, a principle of premillennialism to apply the Old Testament Messianic prophecies to the period following the second, rather than the first, coming of Christ, thus giving them their chief significance in connection with the millennial kingdom which, it is assumed, Christ will then establish. This, characterized by Dr. Snowden as an "enormous unscriptural dislocation," seems necessary to a system which teaches that the world will not and cannot be converted until Christ comes in person to establish his visible and irresistible reign in the earth. This whole assumption is, of course, a huge and audacious begging for position. It is in gross violation of all standard and sane methods of interpretation. Granted the legitimacy of this type of construction, and any vagary ever submitted to human

thought must be accorded standing-room in the arena of discussion. To a mind committed to this basic process, it is just as easy to believe that Jonah swallowed the whale, as that the whale swallowed Jonah.

The capital of the millennial kingdom is to be literally located at Jerusalem. The temple, pictured by Ezekiel, rising in unprecedented grandeur, is to be located on Mount Zion. Here all the devout of the nations are to assemble for worship. The glowing pictures as given by the ancient prophets of vast assemblies gathered at the temple shrines are strictly literalized in connection with millennial predictions. It is not easy to imagine just how this physical diagram is to be carried out. Its acceptance would seem to call for a daring credulity. But there is a faith not easily shared by some minds, "a faith that laughs at impossibilities, and cries, 'It must be done.'" One recent lecturer says: "The modern aeroplane will solve the problem of migration. The aeroplane will be greatly perfected, its speed immeasurably accelerated, its flight made secure by divine protection, so that journeys to Jeru-

salem from the ends of the earth can be compassed in the course of a few hours." Of course, with conditions like these to be commanded, it is idle to discuss any other seeming obstacles to the enterprise!

It would be easy to prove from the pens of many witnesses that the creed of modern premillennialism is a strange harking back from the thought-life of this twentieth century to far-away Old Testament days and usages—days and usages now both dead and silent. While discounting the phenomenal spiritual achievements of the Christianity of to-day, the system calls for a restoration of outgrown rites and ceremonies—for the "blood of bulls and of goats," the smoking altar and the mitered priest. This type of reversion will doubtless survive many of its own prophecies and mistakes. It will doubtless long continue to have attractions for certain types of mind. In the meantime knowledge will increase and wisdom grow, and some day premillennialism will be cast aside, classified as an outgrowth both anomalous and alien in the historic development of a rational Christianity.

## CHAPTER VI

## ANTAGONISTIC OF SCIENTIFIC PROPHECY

MEASURED *a priori*, the falseness of premillennialism is emphasized by its antagonism to dominant scientific and philosophical views of the world. The earliest message of the Old Testament clearly indicates that the supreme purpose of the material and lesser animate creation was subordinate to and preparatory for the advent of man. This was a sublime generalization reached by the Hebrew historian. If the Western mind could divest itself of its stubborn tendency to literalize the fine imaginative and poetic qualities of Oriental thought, there would be seen in this early narrative of Genesis, and without impairment of the moral significance of the message, a fine evidence of a supervising divine inspiration.

Modern science comes to the witness-stand with overwhelming testimony and force to amplify and to confirm the mar-

velous generalization of the Hebrew poet-historian, namely, that man is the crowning end of all creative processes. The Hebrew seer lived in what at best was a limited physical universe. He was familiar only with a narrow geography. His map of nations was small. The earth on which he lived, however diversified by mountain and plain, was, in the main, a flat surface stretching away to its seashore. The heavens above him were a not far removed canopy, hung with the lamps of sun, moon, stars, and planets for the allurement of his fancy and the guidance of his feet. The physical universe, as he saw it, suggested to him no thought of the indefinite æons through which it had been shaped for his habitation and uses. Its structure might have been created by a divine fiat in the course of a few diurnal days, and, for all that he thought, it might at some time be folded together as a vesture, and pass away in a night.

The contrast between the cosmic measurements of Hebrew thought and the known facts of to-day is something immeasurable and indescribable. We now

see the creative periods, so far from being confined to six days of twenty-four hours each, stretching back to beginnings removed to an infinite and dateless past. The boundaries of the physical universe, as now conceived, are limitless. After the expression of Richter's angel, they "are without beginning, and, lo, they are without end!"

Yet, notwithstanding the stupendous expansion, both as to duration and space, of our knowledge of the physical universe, we have thus far reached no height of observation which does not reaffirm the conclusion of the old Hebrew seer that man is the chief goal of all cosmic processes. We are now migrating through infinite fields. Concededly, of course, we are now traversing a realm of speculative thought. We must plant our premises upon inference rather than upon known facts. But, if man is the final end of the material creation, then there is certainly much ground to infer that his kind is to have a long continuance upon the earth. Accepting the fact of an intelligent and moral Creator of the universe, a Creator

who from the beginning has wrought toward, and who has made all material developments subordinate to, moral, spiritual, and eternal ends, then the rational logic of the situation fortifies a revolt against any belief which asserts that the stay of the human race upon the earth is at longest but for a brief period, a period to be terminated in the near future by a stroke of catastrophe. Judging from all human analogy, the time of preparation of the house for its inhabitant is brief as compared with the living tenancy of the house itself. With man always in the foreground of creative thought, the processes of preparing the world for his habitation date far back into infinite time. The mind is staggered by the cosmic process, working all the way from the original mists, and through innumerable changes, to the final completion of the earth as a fitting abode for man. Rational mind refuses to believe that all this infinite preparation is to exhaust its meaning in a few brief centuries. Certainly, all sane science is both impatient and intolerant of such a conclusion.

The earth itself is a great storehouse crowded with materials both needed and to be utilized by a human civilization. The inexhaustible wealth of nature, which seems to have no significance except for the uses of man, has hardly yet been touched. It is even doubtful whether very many of its most potential values have as yet been discovered. The material resources of the earth, both as developed and as yet undiscovered, for the uses of human invention and art, are simply incalculable. The world's fertile lands, under intensive culture, are capable of producing bread and fruit to satisfy the physical hunger of the human race for indefinite ages to come.

Thus far we have been dwelling upon the grosser plane of man's material and inventional needs. But, these needs being met, there is a cultural side of human life upon the earth which rises into transcendent significance and value. The earth is not only a great material storehouse, but it is a vast laboratory, an exhaustless art gallery; within its bosom it enfolds infinite records of God's thought—of his processes

and his purposes toward the human world. All this gives unlimited scope for man's scientific education, for the culture of his esthetical nature, for an ever-growing acquisition of historic, philosophical, and moral knowledge. God has adapted the world as a great training-school for the human race. All the crude material needed as scaffolding for the finer and enduring structures of culture are abundant and cheap. But all the realizations of historic, scientific, and philosophical knowledge, all the developments of art and appliances needed for a growing and perfecting civilization—all this, as growing out of man's study and appropriation of nature's treasures, is as yet but alphabetical. Every new scientific discovery reveals doors opening upon new treasures, every new philosophic achievement lifts thought to new summits of observation, every advance in invention and knowledge adds a new credential to man's lordship in the material universe. The human race in its time-journey thus far in the earth has manifestly reached only the dawn of its intellectual and moral possibilities.

The ancient seers prophesied, and inspired poets sang, of a golden age somewhere embodied in the future of human history. We are accustomed to regard these voices as witnessing to God's own purposes for man. But if we have the open vision and the listening ear, there will be disclosed to us in these very days another prophetic revelation, also voicing God's thought and amply confirming the vision of the ancient seer. This is the prophecy of growing modern scientific knowledge. This revelation contains a confident prediction of the time when, under man's trained and culturing hand, the very earth itself, so far as its material features are concerned, shall be transformed into a human paradise. More than this, the social and moral atmospheres of the world are electric with the prophecy for this world of a coming race that shall be brotherly, just, wise, high-minded, pure—a race over which Christ shall be Sovereign, and the charter of whose society shall be the Golden Rule.

The diagram of this coming world-society will require time for its fulfillment.

But the voices of scientific thought certainly cannot be those of lying prophets. To assert as against nature's own testimony of divine and infinite possibilities the doctrine that the human order is soon to come to a catastrophic end, is to assert a doctrine against which all scientific probabilities enter a combined protest. It makes the cosmic plan of the universe, so far as man is concerned, a mere abortive development. We are unable to believe that nature's boundless wealth of both provision and appliance, apparently in anticipation of man's needs and requirements, is finally to have no more significance than that of a measureless and meaningless waste. While we may not after our human pattern class God as an economist, yet it is impossible for us reverently to think of him as an infinite prodigal. To think of him as storing the universe with unmeasured resources adapted to the needs of man, and of man only, and then, in man's very infancy, and when the resources lie in nature's bosom well-nigh untouched, of suddenly snatching the human race away from the earth, and of setting fire to the store-

house—all this must impress us as an irrational process.

Man is myriad-sided. He is a creature endowed with many faculties. We must believe that every faculty which God has given him has its own significance. It is in the order divinely ordained that each human faculty should have scope for its full function and development. Among the highest gifts with which God has endowed man is the faculty for rational thought—for logic, for philosophy, for scientific investigation, and for all those great generalizations which underlie the world's practical thinking. Man's intellectual nature carries in itself the prophecy of infinite possibilities of development. No goal is in sight beyond which the race may not make unmeasured increase in knowledge and in wisdom. In any ordered world it is inconceivable that man's intellect should not have scope for its finest action, for its fullest development. The cosmic universe itself is adapted and endowed as an unlimited training-school for man's rational powers. All scientific achievement stands as proof of this statement. Nature has fur-

nished the training school and the laboratories out of which has been wrought all scientific knowledge. Still, physical science is but in its infancy. Nature, on every side, challenges it for infinite advancements. To exhaust the scientific resources of the earth would seem to call for industrious and indefinite ages yet to come. The speedy ending of the world calls for a preposterous negation of all scientific prophecy.

The same is true in the broader conception of civilization. God designed this world as a training school for the race in the broader realms of society and of citizenship. Out of man's social nature itself are to be developed and perfected all the relations which are to enter into ideal social, governmental, international civilization for the whole world. The social nature in man is fundamental to God's purposes for His kingdom in the earth. History itself is a revelation of the slow but sure social and civic advances of the race from most primitive beginnings. But, as in the case of the racial intellectual development, the combined testimony of science and of prophecy points to unlimited human advancements

before the ideal civilization is to be realized in the earth. The earth, by all of its endowments and possibilities, is supremely adapted as God's training field for the coming "Golden Age" of humanity. Suddenly to destroy the world, when as yet God's diagram for humanity seems only in its initial fulfillment—such a proposition, in all rational measurement, can but seem as both enigmatical and perverse. All this, in the vision of rational science, is preposterous. The scientific mind firmly refuses to believe that nature is a false prophet. It cannot look upon the cosmic order, infinite both in wealth and promise, as simply a huge deception. It cannot think of human existence upon the earth, as in the acceptance of the premillennial philosophy it would be compelled to, as something no better than a meaningless medley. The scientific mind will stand in perpetual revolt against such teaching. A sane philosophy of thought will condemn it as irrational. The hard practical sense of the business world will repudiate it. The very stars in their silent march will fight against and finally destroy its absurdities.

## CHAPTER VII

## A FALSE PSYCHOLOGY OF HISTORY

PREMILLENNIALISM does not yield a true psychology of history. Its outlook upon the historic program of the world is pessimistic and distorted. It fails to be inspired by the splendid moral and spiritual progress, now in full evidence, of Christ's kingdom in the earth. So far as it has influence at all, in this age of growing spiritual life and light, it is a blind leader of the blind.

A fact which we must ever keep before us is that the Bible, as a whole, is a book not to be judged or measured on a plane of materialistic literalism. Its interpretations must be lifted to moral and spiritual levels. From beginning to end its moral unity must be discovered and demonstrated by its spiritually prophetic outlook. It is perfectly clear, and may be reverently said, that unless the meaning of its great proph-

ecies is to be finally found in a spiritual significance, then many of these prophecies themselves are quite misleading. History is the great interpreter. The significance of this fact is tremendously emphasized when its tests are applied to the most prominent heights of Old Testament statement.

For instance, Israel went down into Egypt to avoid famine, and to live peacefully in a land of plenty. But Egypt finally meant for Israel an intolerable enslavement. Moses was God's appointed deliverer for this race. But the generation that went out of Egypt with Moses perished in the desert. Joshua was to lead their successors into the "Promised Land." But when they arrived at the gates they met there with all sorts and manners of opposition. They could possess the promised inheritance only at the price of war. For whole generations the career of Israel in Canaan was one of continuous turmoil, one prolonged conflict with idolatrous and alien tribes. When the Judaic theocracy would seem well-nigh attained; when the glorious temple, the most beautiful house of wor-

ship in the world, its arches resonant with a gorgeous ritual, stood on Mount Zion, when the pious Jews were most sure that Jehovah, the Lord of Hosts, was pledged as against all foes, to the perpetuity and glory of the Hebrew nation—even then hostile armies were mustering for the destruction of Jerusalem and for the utter laying in waste of its temple. The very "chosen people" of God were to be driven like slaves to a dismal, hopeless, and distant captivity in Babylon.

It would seem that in all literature nothing could exceed the glowing description given by the great prophets as to the grandeur and triumphs which should attend these captives when they should return again to Jerusalem, once more to establish their walls and to rebuild their temple. But the real history of such captives as returned presents only a drama of poverty, of disappointment, of discouragement.

The Jewish people were intensely ambitious for a national autonomy. As the elect and chosen people of Jehovah, they forever indulged themselves in the hope

that under the direct reign of the Almighty God they were to realize a kingdom of surpassing glory and power in the earth. There can be no doubt, I must think, that the thought of many of the great prophetic utterances was inspired by this vision. But, alas for human forecast! This national hope too proved illusive. The Jewish people nevermore, after the captivity, enjoyed anything like a national autonomy, except for a brief period of eighty years, beginning with B. C. 142. In a material sense the Israelitish people were never permitted to realize the fruitful heritage and the triumphal career so vividly foretold by their prophetic teachers. Applying the same historic test to early Christian eschatological thought, which we have seen was largely an inheritance from Judaism, that Christ would soon return to rule the world in a visible and materialistic glory, we also discover, as in full keeping with the prophecies of Old Testament history, that this view was one, certainly in the form in which it was held, which was never verified.

The obvious truth is that, if we are to

be governed by a sound interpretation of the Bible and of history itself, we must translate God's thought and purposes for his kingdom among men in terms of the moral and spiritual rather than under any earthly or physical symbolism. Even Christ himself found frequent occasion to chide his own disciples for their inherited and persistent tendency to interpret all his mission in terms of a worldly realm.

A grave charge, the gravest kind of a charge, to be made against premillennialism is that its philosophy is fatally out of harmony with God's historic and manifest method for the moral redemption of the world. Nearly two thousand years have passed since Christ arose from Bethany. The plain logic of premillennialism is that in all these centuries God has been dealing with the world by inefficient processes. The world itself is looked upon as hopelessly bad. Its open sore is incurable by such methods as God has employed through all these so-called Christian centuries. The most that can be expected is that an exceptional soul, here and there, may be rescued from the sinking wreck. Substan-

tially from the beginning of history, human society has been gliding morally downward. The present age is one of the worst and most hopeless in all history. From the bosom of society, however intellectual, however scientific, however inventive, can spring forth no remedial agencies which can efficiently work the world's betterment. As one has said, "The present order of society is something to be damned, not to be redeemed."

I do not say that the devotees of this philosophy rejoice in their vision of the world's growing wickedness and hopelessness. But this outlook is fundamental and essential to their beliefs. The world's fearful and hopeless collapse into wickedness alone furnishes the justifying premise on which they build their expectation of a sudden and catastrophic ending of the present age—an ending to be effected by the phenomenal appearing of Christ in the clouds for the purpose of working the physical destruction of his foes from the earth.

The pessimism of premillennialism for our human world is like a cancerous virus vitiating its entire blood. The real logic of

its philosophy is to unfit men for healthy views of human life, to unnerve and to make them listless toward life's practical duties. Saint Paul early discovered this tendency in the church at Thessalonica. People obsessed by the idea of the Lord's speedy coming became neglectful and improvident toward the ordinary duties and necessities of their normal, everyday life in the world.

Measured with equal justice and sympathy, there is seen nothing so marvelous in history as the testimony which it furnishes concerning the person of Jesus Christ, and the power of his growing kingdom in the earth—a kingdom which premillennialism teaches as something not yet inaugurated. Placing ourselves among historic origins, we need to have large and clear apprehension of the religious conditions of the world in order to any just understanding of the marvelous moral transformations which have been wrought through the name and power of the historic Christ. Rome is so commonly and so superficially referred to in colloquial expression as to seem to the average mind

no more significant than a threadbare term. But the real Rome will stand forever like a very Mont Blanc in human history. Humanly measured, it was the greatest governmental construction that ever yet has come to civilization. Its dominion extended from the rivers of the Orient to the shores of the Atlantic. Its governmental genius was consummate. While its authority was imperial and supreme, its rule was so adaptive and so considerate of the opinions and customs of its widely varying subjects as to capture and blend in enthusiastic loyalty the most diverse populations. The magic of its very name was such as to inspire the remotest provincial with a desire to be affiliated with its life. Religion received high consideration in the policies of the empire. These policies were, as a matter of course, polytheistic in scope. In the Pantheon there was a place for every god, and there might have been a tablet for every faith. But it is not easy to realize the full significance of all this even when we search laboriously the records of all the ancient religions which were domesticated and, in a sense, coordinated

in the Roman Pantheon. There were India and Egypt, Babylonia, Assyria, Persia, and Greece, together with the barbarians of northern and western Europe. Nothing seemingly could be more diverse and irreconcilable in types of nationality and religion. But the genius of Rome domesticated and blended all these faiths, with the possible exception of the Jews, into its own governmental household. It was as though there were but one religion for the world.

All this is surpassingly wonderful, but the wonder grows into amazement as we estimate the power, the exclusiveness, and persistency of the great ancient faiths. Rome, in her historic achievements, and not least in her coordination of world-religions, cannot well be hyperbolized. She will forever stand in the gaze of history—unique, majestic, wonderful. To all contemporaneous thought she might well seem a structure built for eternity.

At the very height of all this power, of its culture, of its wealth, of its prosperity, of its luxury, a Peasant was humbly born in a remote and despised province of the

empire. That a babe so born would be potential in changing the character of Rome, and of giving a new direction to the destinies of the world, would seem in anticipation the most remote of probabilities. But the Peasant of Nazareth, himself never holding the scepter of secular government, never supported by militant organizations, never wearing the ermine of judicial authority, and never a university student or literary author—to him was reserved the mission literally to transform the face of the world and to give to civilization a new moral direction.

Antecedently, the obstacles to such a mission would seem both immeasurable and insuperable, and all the more so when we consider the character of his reforms. The gods of polytheism were universally impure. Neither in character nor history did they inspire their worshipers with lofty moral ideals. The polytheistic faiths were rooted deeply in racial traditions, and nothing is more difficult to enlighten and reform than stubborn religious traditionalism. Polytheistic faiths preoccupied the ground. They were intrenched in temples, in priest-

hoods, in altar, in ritual. To change all this would require a well-nigh absolute revision of the world's religious habits and customs. It would require an entire new conception of God, a substitution of one God for the mob of heathen divinities, a God of holiness, perfect in wisdom, goodness, and love, a God of universal and supreme authority. It would require new moral standards of character, of thought, and of conduct, not only for individuals and society, but for entire civilizations. It would require new inspirations, new ideals, new hopes, new moral migrations for the entire human race. Surely, it can be no wonder that the sophistical Greek mind should regard all this as a scheme of "foolishness."

But the work of Jesus of Nazareth is history. He depended entirely upon moral agencies, upon spiritual forces for the achievement of his mission. And he, as no other force, and as not all other forces combined, has revolutionized the world morally. The march of his success was along the bloody pathway of persecution and of martyrdom, but with his progress

the gods of ancient polytheism disappeared, their altars were deserted, and their temples were left to crumble down upon their foundations. Such was the marvel of his progress that within a few centuries mighty Rome itself renounced its polytheism and became at least nominally Christian. The history is one of enchanting allurement. We may no longer dwell upon its features.

Christ still lives. His moral reign is an ever-widening force in the earth and in history. Wherever his name is most exalted, there appear the highest developments of personal character, of social morality and culture, the sturdiest commercial integrity, the most wise and humane governments. The foreign missions established in the name of Christ are not only winning whole populations to the standards of his cross, but they are furnishing such a wealth of new social and moral idealism, such new intellectual *stimuli*, such uplifting inspirations and hopes, as rapidly to disintegrate and to displace throughout the Oriental world the fundamental usages and traditions of paganism. Christian movements are springing into new and

winning life in a day. Nothing perhaps in the Christian world to-day is more noteworthy than the present great awakening throughout the churches to a new and widespread interest in missions. Like a mighty giant, suddenly awakened by a new vision, American Christianity, as never before, with a tenfold strength, is planning new campaigns for the missionary conquest of the world. The kingdom of Jesus Christ is not only an ever-widening realm, but in all just measurement it can appear as nothing less than the most divinely significant moral movement in the world's history.

The present age is dominantly scientific, constructive, prophetic. The clear vision of present-day prophets, both in religion, in philosophy, and in business, revels in a growing future of blessedness for mankind. By an instinct as infallible as gravitation, the hard-headed, constructive business mind of the age is repelled by the pessimism and the fallacies of the premillennial philosophy.

Obviously, it is wisdom that we should give heed to the teachings of history, and take some measured account of the total

and overwhelming development of normal Christian thought in the world. The world, indeed, presents a drama of moral struggle, but it is a struggle ever resulting in bettered moral conditions for the race. Christian history, as measured by the scale of the centuries, presents a great pageant of marvelous and optimistic prophetic achievement. God is surely, if apparently slowly, shaping the world for the scepter of his Son. Multiplying signs foretoken a new day. The watchman of the morning, as he brushes from his locks the dews of the night, beholds a far-flung "red of the dawn."

The great war through which we have come has been a marvelous revealer of altruisms. The choice life of the world has not only poured itself out upon the altars of sacrifice, but wealth in unprecedented volume has been consecrated to the cause of humanity. The most perfectly trained surgical and medical skill, the most cultured and idealistic young womanhood, the most beautiful womanhood—all reenforced by consummate science and by every material appliance—have been mo-

bilized for humane service. If the war has inflicted untold suffering upon the world, it has also furnished the occasion for revealing and exalting a human beneficence akin to the divine.

Universal thought has been challenged and much occupied in just the recent time by the ideal of a "League of Nations." What does it mean? It means a tremendous drive of altruism on a world-scale. Nations in blocks are proposing to forego hitherto selfish and cherished interests for the sake of forming a safe and secure alliance for world-harmony and for the universal rights of man. It would be too much to expect that the ideal result would certainly have been secured by the deliberations of the Paris Council. The settled and vicious habits of world-diplomacy and politics are not likely to be ideally reformed, and to receive a permanent new direction, by a single draft, drawn by a council of diverse thinkers, for a new constitution of the world. But, whatever the weaknesses or the defects of this initial attempt, it must be counted as a great, a tremendous stride in the direc-

tion of human progress. A workable and abiding world-league may not come in a day; but it is on the way, and is sure to arrive. The thrones of aristocracy are tumbling. We are in the rising era of world democracy. Protestant Christianity itself, too long and too much divided into competitive sects, is seeking as never before, and at its very centers of power, to reconstitute itself into an organic and working unity for its more effective moral conquest of the world. The traffics of impurity and intemperance were never so resisted, never so hard hit, as to-day. There never were so penetrating and analyzing studies of social and industrial conditions as now: never so firm and general a purpose to install social and industrial equities. Great and unprecedented philanthropies are multiplying upon every hand, and are evermore effectively reaching out to human needs.

The times are socially and morally dynamic. This is the birth-time of forces which are to take a new direction of the world. The agencies of progress were never so numerous, never so effective. Con-

tinents and oceans are traversed at express speed. The age commands electric and instant knowledge of all current human movements throughout the world. The processes of world education are pervasive and rapid as never before. The public conscience was never so sensitive to moral issues. The alliance of moral forces was never so potential. If in the past enviroining shadows have at times made somewhat uncertain the courses of human history, it is blindness now to doubt that new and guiding lights are gathering upon all skies. We know that in this very day as in no other day prophet eyes do catch a glory surely gaining on the shade. The conflict between good and evil forces is indeed drastic, and may be unhappily prolonged; but civilization is surely migrating to its better heritage—a heritage in which righteousness, brotherhood, enlightenment, and liberty shall assert perpetual sway.

It may be unhesitatingly admitted that the present age, with all its historic optimism, seems one of unprecedented turmoil. It is an age which might well inspire new apocalypses. Its oceanic tides of ca-

tastrophe seem to be smiting all the shorelines of the world. Still, we ought by this time to have learned, and to have become somewhat prepared for the fact, that God has a way of making great use of what we call catastrophes in his scheme for the moral development of mankind. But just because God is supervising the diagram we may confidently believe that there never was a brighter outlook for the future of the race than that which is furnished in the present conditions of Christian history.

## CHAPTER VIII

## CHRIST'S KINGDOM: ITS TRUE CHARACTER

THE kingdom of Christ is spiritual in its ideals and processes. The supreme Agency for its realization is the Holy Spirit. Christ used the phrase embodying the term "kingdom" in a variety of applications. It was a term familiarly in use among the Jewish people of his time. He doubtless used the term as a convenient approach to the minds whom he would teach. It does not follow, however, that his thought in the use of the term was limited to the common conception. His conception of the kingdom carried distinct, new, and large meanings far exceeding the thought of his hearers. It is certain that he never shared the prevalent thought of his day as to the materialistic, or essentially worldly, character of the kingdom itself. His disciples, as we have had occasion repeatedly to note, all Jews, never

relaxed during his earthly lifetime their conviction that the dominion which their Master was about to establish would be of a materialistic and spectacular character. They had most indefinite and undefined ideas as to the modes and measures he would employ in installing himself as king. The crude conception of the people is illustrated by the very eagerness in which, after one of his great miracles, they conspired per force to make and to proclaim Christ king.

Christ himself never gave place to this view. There would seem possibly some indication that in the initial days of his mission the thought of a temporal kingdom may, as a temptation, have thrust itself upon him. The significant lesson of the scene in the wilderness would seem to be in his triumphant and utter rejection of all temptation to secure his reign by the submission of himself to mercenary or political policies. He refused to appeal to the people by the exercise of any spectacular power. He would not promote his own sovereignty by any gratification of a popular wonderlust. He silenced within him-

self all temptation to gain popular recognition and power by yielding either to the clamor of appetite or to the allurements of the natural human ambition for power. Whatever may have been his consciousness of possessing in himself a divine power over the forces of nature, Christ never once swerved from pursuing the moral and spiritual method.

Christ's conception of the kingdom, within whatever figure he described it, was always spiritual, and not material; always a divine reign within the soul rather than any enforced authority from without. It would be nearly a perfect definition of Christ's thought of the kingdom if we were to say that it meant to him simply God's reign in the human heart.

For a vivid impression of the lesson which he intended to teach, Christ doubtless did deal with the familiar phrase "kingdom of God" and its kindred phrases, in both parabolic and apocalyptic expression. Sometimes his application is to the heavenly life exclusively, but more often to the spiritual estate of his people in the

present world. He says the coming of the kingdom is "without observation." It is like the wind that bloweth. The sound thereof can be heard, but whence it cometh or whither it goeth, no man can tell. It is like leaven in meal. It works gradually until the whole body is leavened. It is like a small seed cast into the ground. At first it seems negligible, but after a time it evolves into a full-grown tree. Sometimes Christ utters himself in apocalyptic figure. Preceding the end, the "Son of man" is to appear in the clouds of heaven attended by the holy angels.

Christ spoke often of the actual presence of the kingdom when conversing with his disciples. He said to his critics, the Pharisees, "If I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you." In one of his later conversations he said, "Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom." "Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, The time is

fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel." "And he said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power." "So likewise ye, when ye shall see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand. Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all be fulfilled."

In the very nature of many of his utterances, Christ can be construed only as assigning a moral, a spiritual meaning to his kingdom. It is more a matter of the heart, of the interior life, than at all a question of outwardly imposed authority. He said to Pilate: "My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence." To the young man of great native beauty of character, whom Jesus loved as he looked upon him, and who answered the searching moral questions of Christ with conscien-

tious discreetness, Christ said, "Thou art not far from the kingdom of God." "And when he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you." Saint Paul tells us that "the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit." And again to the Corinthian church he says: "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God." It is to be noted that all these expressions are to be construed on the basis that the kingdom is a present fact and process in the world.

We must measure and interpret all of Christ's sayings concerning his kingdom by projecting ourselves, so far as possible, into

the very social and psychological atmospheres through which he moved. This may not be an easy task. It is, however, evident that Christ as a Teacher must, perforce, deal in expressions familiar to the common mind. But we may not limit his meaning to the measure of the common thought. He was dealing with the momentous and far-reaching facts of God's final purposes for the world. He was dealing with these facts from the unobscured viewpoints of his own divine prescience. The common and traditional mind had no vision, no measurement, for filling Christ's words with the wealth of his deeper and eternal meanings. Not even Christ himself assumed to know the time of the end, which, so far from being within his human purview, was reserved alone for the decision of the Father. While misunderstandings and misconstructions of Christ's sayings by those who originally heard them were inevitable, it may not be an easy task for us now to clear these early constructions from their obscurities. Our own attempted judgments of some of Christ's eschatological statements may also

be misconceived. It is certain that, so far as reported, many of these statements are not easy of harmonization. In their study, we are evidently dealing with fragmentary utterances, rather than with complete and full-rounded statements of Christ's eschatological knowledge. This is a field in which we may fittingly and humbly recognize our limited understanding of Christ's full thought.

There is clear evidence, however, that his disciples must either have misunderstood or misconstrued Christ's teachings concerning last things; or that the New Testament church was swayed by convictions for which his teachings did not furnish justification. The early church did most surely and prevalently look for the near return of Christ to end the present order of the world. This view was undoubtedly held by Christ's immediate apostles. But, however derived, history proves it to have been a mistaken view. In the light of our best available knowledge, it is difficult to see how this view could be indubitably, or even probably, deduced from his teaching. A preponderance of his words would cer-

tainly seem to indicate a gradual and long development of the kingdom before reaching its historic consummation.

The kingdom, as he conceived it, is non-political and universal in its scope. Its effective agencies are purely spiritual. Its citizenship is to be made up of the people from all nations, including only those who choose righteousness. From the human level, the foundations of this kingdom rest alone in individual hearts in which God reigns. Christ committed himself to what might seem the audacious proposition of morally transforming civilization from the basis of regenerated individual lives—lives inwardly purified and made luminous by the indwelling Spirit of God. By the multiplying miracle of such lives, and by their creative activities, all civilizations are finally to be morally leavened. Not by the imposition of outward might and rule, but by the vitalizing power of God's Spirit in the inner life of men—a Spirit that shall be as morally transforming to human nature as are the influences of spring suns and atmospheres upon the ice-bound earth—human society, with all its moral agen-

cies and institutions, is to come under the divine reign.

From many standpoints it is difficult to see how the premillennial scheme meets the fundamental requirements of the spiritual kingdom. According to Christ's promise it is the mission of the Holy Spirit to take of the things of Christ, and to show them unto men. The Holy Spirit is to lead the church into all the truth. He is to convict the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. In the great and final commission which follows Christ's promise of the abiding Spirit, there is not the slightest hint of any change to take place in Christ's methods of administration till the very end of the world shall be reached. To use an old expression, the Holy Spirit is to be "Christ's Executive" until the end of time.

The spiritual methods of Christianity find their responsive counterpart in the moral constitution of human nature. Christianity ministers in spiritual messages to which man's native moral sense responds as inevitably as the receiver of wireless telegraphy responds to the message sent from the initiating source. Man's moral

consciousness is keyed with a definite certainty to the message which God's Spirit will project upon it. Within every human breast there is a moral consciousness which reports infallibly in favor of spiritual truth, which in spite of all inward revolt of selfish motives, calls imperatively upon the will to give supreme heed to the spiritual message. In the background of this tremendous appeal there is always enthroned the sovereignty of the human will. It is always possible, however clear the light, or convincing the message, for the human will to say "No" to God. The moral consciousness is social. It is universal. It holds in itself the one ground and hope for all missionary enterprise. The heathen nature, in regions where the name of the historic Christ never has been spoken, wherever the spiritual message of his gospel is translated to its intelligence, awakens at once, as into a spontaneous life, to the quickening touch of that message. That spiritual nature implanted by God in universal humanity flames at once into unwonted expression under the quickening touch of new spiritual truth. The very phenomena

of missions themselves, and marvelously in most recent advances, furnish irrefutable confirmation of the divine effectiveness of a purely spiritual Christianity. Not Pentecost itself, with all the glow of its unique phenomena, furnishes more convincing proof of the power of the Holy Spirit to transform and to inspire the lives of men than is demonstrated on many and multiplying fields in the modern missionary world.

Our premillennial friends, however, so far as the conversion of the world is concerned, insist that the present spiritual order is a failure. Christ himself, in any sense adequate for the evangelization of the race, has not as yet manifested himself to the world. Their view seems to be that there is no final hope for humanity save in the personal appearing of our Lord to install himself in a visible and irresistible reign among men. This view, to say nothing about its irreconcilability with the general trend of New Testament teaching, flies directly in the face of our Lord's last and great commission to his church. The very psychology of premillennialism in its rela-

tion to these great questions is plainly such as to make impossible its acceptance by the vast majorities of biblical students.

Quite aside, however, from the *pro forma* statements of the premillennial view of the kingdom, it is difficult to surmount the obvious moral objections to the view itself. It is far from apparent that any reign of Christ's visible person upon the earth, however majestic in phenomena, would prove effective in the moral transformation of mankind. Certainly, it is alien to all moral philosophy to assume that Christ will secure such transformation by any sovereign exercise of his power. He once upon the earth performed miracles of wonder as outer credentials of his divinity. But we have no proof that these miracles in themselves resulted in any general moral improvement in the characters of their beholders. Indeed, we have Christ's own testimony as to the faulty philosophy of such a conclusion. When Dives, suffering the torments of retribution, besought that an angel might be sent to warn his brethren upon the earth against his own terrible fate, the teaching is that if they would not

listen to Moses and the prophets, neither would they be persuaded though one should rise from the dead. Spiritual transformation must come from the voluntary surrender of the individual to the enlightening power of moral and spiritual appeal. If, when he was upon the earth, Christ's miracles signally failed to subdue and change the obdurate hearts of men, then what justification is there for expecting that the establishing of a visible and majestic throne in Jerusalem would result in the moral renewal of the world?

Such, however, is but one of many suggested difficulties of the situation. If Christ is to reign visibly upon the earth, then his throne must have local place and habitation. Premillennialism does not shrink from this view. By large consent, Mount Zion in Jerusalem is to be the visible headquarters of the kingdom. But, if so, another question arises, namely, How is the human family universally to come under the direct influence of Christ's power? There came a time in Jewish history when it was authoritatively directed that the temple at Jerusalem should be the

one place in the nation to which all devout souls should periodically repair for worship. This movement was instituted in the interests of religious reform. The worship at the outlying historic shrines had become so invaded and corrupted by idolatrous influences and usages as to call for the very obliteration of these shrines themselves. Thus the entire official worship of the nation was placed under direction of the temple authorities. This requirement was measurably practicable because of the limited area of Hebrew territory. There could be at least an occasional migration of the Palestinian Jews to one or more of the great religious festivals held at Jerusalem. A moral effect of the change was that all devout thought was turned toward the temple as to the one most sacred center of the world.

Isaiah idealizes the universal worship which shall take place at Jerusalem: "And it shall come to pass, that from one new moon to another, . . . shall all flesh come to worship before me, saith the Lord." When the universal religious dominion comes to be established at Jerusalem, this

is his conception: "And they shall bring all your brethren for an offering unto the Lord out of all nations, upon horses, and in chariots, and in litters, and upon mules, and upon swift beasts, to my holy mountain Jerusalem, saith the Lord." Had they been in his vision, there can be no doubt that the prophet would have included among his vehicles express railroad trains, automobiles, and aeroplanes. Much allowance, no doubt, is to be made for the figurative character of this description. The whole may be but a poetic picture vividly setting forth the prophet's conception of the religious centrality and glory of Jerusalem when the future Messianic kingdom of which he dreamed should be fully established. Isaiah's limited geographical purview may well minify to our thought the extravagance of his imagery. But what shall be thought of a religious conception which can literalize such a passage!

Now, very well understanding the answer which premillennialism would give to the illustration which I am about to present, I nevertheless offer the illustration. If the entire present human family, consisting

probably of not less than 1,700,000,000 of persons, were to come under the sway of Christ's kingdom, then what sort of possibility would there be of all these people ever worshiping at one place, either at Jerusalem or elsewhere? It is generally conceded, I suppose, that even in the millennium human beings will still have to eat and to sleep. Picture, if we may, the vast present population of the earth, as in the prophet's picture, all seeking a religious pilgrimage to Jerusalem. To say nothing of the conceivable difficulties of transportation, if pilgrims to the shrine could be limited to 100,000 at a time—and this would doubtless tax the ordinary hospitality of the place—and their stay were to be limited in each case to a single week, even so, it would require more than three hundred and twenty-six years of continuous pilgrimage to accommodate as many as now live upon the earth in a single generation. It requires but a moment's reflection to convince us of how physically impossible it would be, for instance, to assemble for a religious festival at one headquarters all the populations of a city like New York or

London within the respective corporate limits of these cities. An attempted application of the idea to the entire present population of the earth, by its very absurdity, of course, puts the whole proposition instantly out of commission.

The premillennial teacher, however, will tell us that all this kind of calculation is quite aside from the requirements of the case, and is wholly gratuitous. The inference is that the millennial population of the earth will be infinitesimal as compared to the present situation. When Christ comes he will find faith in the earth so rare as to reduce the real number of the elect to a comparatively few. The vast majorities either shall be destroyed from the Lord's presence, or continue to sleep in the grave. The first resurrection will occur at Christ's coming, when the righteous dead shall be raised, and be reunited with the righteous who remain alive upon the earth. Premillennialists do not, as a rule, ostentatiously presume to announce the proximate numbers of the righteous who shall remain upon the earth after the first resurrection. Presumably, how-

ever, the entire number could be colonized in a comparatively small territory, possibly in Palestine alone. Perhaps this may be the plan. It has already been announced that the significance of General Allenby's capture of Jerusalem means just this. It is a step preparatory to the restoration of Palestine as the future home of the Lord's elect. From such a standpoint, leaving out of consideration all other suggested difficulties, it might not seem so impracticable to assemble the saints in one or more annual meetings at Jerusalem.

For the sake of emphasis, however, upon some reflections which naturally force themselves to the front in this discussion, I venture to return to the illustration drawn from the present world population. We cannot escape a woefully tragic impression which is conveyed in the premillennial theory of the vast reductions and destructions of the present populations of the earth as compared with the millennial period. Both a rational philosophy and the humane instincts enter gravest protest against the proposition. In the light of this program, we may ask: What is the

meaning of the great historic civilizations? What is the meaning of all the marvelous material progress of the race—of learning, philosophy, science, art, poetry, invention, social refinements, the ever-growing sense of ethical ideals and of human brotherhood? What is the meaning of man's universal religiousness, of the unnumbered worshipers who from numerous and various creedal bases have turned their faces devoutly toward God? Is it at all probable, is it morally possible, that the great Creator through all the ages has willed that the human race should innumerably propagate itself, developing all its arts, sciences, idealisms, worships, and prophetic hopes, only at last that the whole vast drama should close in catastrophe and death, with the final result that only the barest remnant marked as the "elect" should be rescued from the universal ruin? What are we to think or conclude concerning such a plan for the universe? This view puts an absolute reversal and negation upon all rational philosophy. The human reason is absolutely unable from its own normal premises and processes to dis-

cern either wisdom or beneficence from such an administration of the world. If reason has any function, or right of self-sovereignty, then this view of human destiny puts the thinking mind into a mood of unalterable revolt against such an ordering of the universe.

The system hardly can be reviewed without suggesting the sense of smugness and complacency which it is adapted to beget in the minds of its beneficiaries. "We are the elect!" "We can, and we must, be happy though all the myriads of the race aside from ourselves are born to a destiny of tragedy, though they must all perish in cataclysmic cyclone and flame!" This conception is not to be dwelt upon. It is essentially horrible. Its logic, in its general sweep, is more drastic than Calvin's *Horribile Decretum.* The system of premillennialism, in many vital respects, simply overloads itself. However self-confident its adherents, it creates for itself the impression of pronouncing a minority and misguided utterance as against a whole world of reason. It is a doctrine doubtless sincerely held by many, but the verdict of

the world's growing reason increasingly decrees it as fundamentally false.

Again, the literalism of a local throne at Jerusalem, or elsewhere, for the reigning Christ, places, so far as we can see, a fatal limitation upon Christ's contact with the souls of believers. The Holy Spirit can be everywhere effectively present. But a localized Sovereign, however ineffable his presence, cannot be humanly seen and communed with at points far distant from his habitation. If it should still be said that the Holy Spirit conveys the motive of Christ to those physically removed from his presence, then, it may be asked, what advantage for the many will the fact of Christ's visible reign in the earth have over the present dispensation? The Holy Spirit can just as effectively carry the message of Christ from his dwelling place in the heavens, as to deliver the same message from a visible throne located at Jerusalem.

It is never a pleasant task to pronounce adverse criticism upon beliefs conscientiously held. But the obvious truth seems to be that premillennialism has so literal-

ized and translocated the coming kingdom of Christ into terms of Old Testament Scripture as pretty much to have lost perspective of the whole situation. Its teachers have constructed around themselves a wall of artificial opinions so high as to exclude their vision from the ever-widening horizons of human thought and knowledge. They appear either blind or oblivious to the fact, so fully taught throughout the New Testament, and especially expounded in the Epistle to the Hebrews, that the Old Testament loses itself in the New, that in Christ the Old Testament prophecies have their fulfillment, and that the Mosaic ritual is displaced, its shadows having disappeared in the glories of the Christian revelation. A profound displacement in premillennial thought, a fatal displacement of attitude, is that its face is turned toward a Jewish and outworn past rather than forward to the spiritualized day of the Christian future. Judaism is an outgrown system. While it ever will hold a sublime historic place in God's progressive revelation for the world, it has at present neither room

nor provision in its geographical territory for even a temporary rendezvous for the constructive Christian forces now at work in the world. God's working plans for humanity have ever had a forward, and not a backward, outlook.

So far as the salvation of the world is concerned, we are now living in God's final dispensation—the dispensation of the *Spirit*. The Spirit, with a perfect divine functioning, is ever inspiring and guiding the processes of Christ's kingdom in the earth. This kingdom, while not of the world in the sense that its mission is worldly, political, mercenary, or temporal in its aims, is nevertheless in the world, and is increasingly subsidizing and utilizing all the normal material agencies of society, of education, and of business in furtherance of its spiritual ends. The church ranks as its chief training-school for character and work. In this capacity the church will never be superseded. But the church does not specifically direct all the interests of the kingdom. The spirit of Christianity pervasive in the world's thought, giving increasingly its own rationale to philos-

ophy, to science, to social ideals, to business, is evermore clearly furnishing the moral standards of civilization. If it be true that

> "Through the ages one increasing purpose runs
> And the thoughts of men are widened with the process of the suns,"

it is equally true that, under all the widening horizons of human advancement, the kingdom of Christ shines forth with ever-increasing glory and power. The divine promise is that its progress never will cease until all the kingdoms of the earth are taken up into the one kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ.

## CHAPTER IX

## COORDINATED FACTORS OF THE KINGDOM

Both the fact and importance of the assimilating and correlating functions of Christ's spiritual kingdom in the world cannot well be over-emphasized. The kingdom has a divine capacity for assimilating into itself and for coordinating to its purposes all the helpful factors of civilization. The kingdom of Christ is not mechanical; it is biological. It is not described by geometrical lines, nor by any merely logical or artificial systems of thought. It is not a system. It is a life. The historic creeds may have gone far toward defining its laws, but the creeds do not govern the kingdom. It is itself the supreme moral organizer of the world. It stands in history, and for all time, for God's thought, for God's supreme purposes for the race. It is the mightiest, the most inspirational, the most inventive,

the most self-appropriating power in the world. The world itself has no standing, no final meaning, apart from God's kingdom among men.

A divine significance to all this—a significance which the church has been too slow to discover—is that the kingdom of God has moral uses for all temporal factors and agencies which may be made legitimately to contribute to human welfare. It must be conceded that the architecture of human society, as now developed, is seriously defective at many points. Imperfections have arisen from many causes. Existing defects in the social structure have come from imperfect knowledge, from limited vision. The processes of evolution, at any stage, do not necessarily mean perfection of art. Society is a growing organization. Its own creations will progressively improve with growing experience and knowledge. As there enter into its structure better ideals and nobler motives, its own character will take on increasing luminousness and perfection. Knowledge is one of the supreme conditions of attainment.

A tragical fact is that many of the chief defects of the present social order have grown out of human viciousness. Men, in disturbing numbers, have been wickedly selfish, dishonest, and impure in motive and conduct. Such often have sought to subsidize the very organisms of society for evil ends. Many of the most afflictive limitations and hurts from which society suffers have arisen almost solely from the conspiracies of evil minds.

But, whatever may be its present limitations or imperfections, or whatever their causes, it remains true that human society itself is no chance structure in the world. It is something which has arisen from fundamental human nature. It has its sources in a divine ordination for the human order. Man's primary gregarious aptitudes, his natural gravitation to social relationships, are in themselves prophetic of the moral and spiritual brotherhood of mankind—a brotherhood which has its primal source in the Fatherhood of God.

In many circles of thought much, and well-nigh exclusive, emphasis is placed upon man's purely spiritual and worship-

ful nature, and this in distinction from his intellectual and inventive life, as though the only valuation which God sets upon man, the only uses which he plans for him, are included solely in what we may here conveniently designate as the worshipful and spiritual side alone of human nature. As over against this view, it is to be fully emphasized that in the ideal normal state—the state which is to be more and more perfectly realized with the growth of the kingdom—all the uses of all of man's faculties, and in all relations, will be counted as sacred. In the ideal spiritual state, man's loyalties to God will inspire, through all their entire range, all his activities. This very anticipation justifies the premise that God purposes, in the development of his kingdom, more and more perfectly to utilize all the human faculties, together with all the legitimate products of thought and invention.

Man's structure is a divine unity. We have no right, for the sake of emphasizing what we may narrowly judge as his spiritual worth, to apply a process of dissection to man's nature by which we shall cut out

from his structure such parts as we may blindly consider spiritually useless. We have no right in the interests of any religious theory to eliminate from man, or to consign to ignoble ends, any single one of his God-given powers. To do this would be to mutilate God's workmanship, and to commit an iconoclasm against the divine ideal. Shakespeare has given us a far better picture of the divine ideal of man. He says:

"What a piece of work is man! how noble in reason! how infinite in faculty! in form and moving how express and admirable! in action, how like an angel! in apprehension, how like a god! the beauty of the world! the paragon of animals!

Man's intellectual nature alone is one which God ordained for highest achievements. That vision must be indeed pitiably mole-eyed which in presence of the stupendous creations of man's thought could give to his intellectual faculties an ignoble rating. God, the supreme Thinker, the infinite intellect, has potentially made man in his own image. By the exercise of his God-given thought faculty man has credentialed himself in imperial lordship over the world of nature. By the sheer

exercise of his intellect, he not only traces on lightning wing God's processes to the remotest immensities, but he is increasingly converting the earth on which he lives into a vast laboratory for the arts of his civilization. The human intellect, inquisitorial, reflective, inspirational, inventive, creative, is ordained of God as one of the chief agencies for the development of his kingdom in the earth. Measured from the standpoint of broad vision and calm reason, that religious conception would seem indeed to be a poor importation into human thought which assumes that all the splendid creations of man's mind, as in the social structure, in government, in history, in philosophy, in poetry, in art, in science, in invention—that all these and their kind are to perish when Christ's kingdom is fully disclosed. These are the very agencies of which Christ will make continuous and increasing use in the building of his kingdom to its final completion.

Of course it is the mission of the spiritual process to progressively ethicize, illuminate, and purify all these agencies, making them ever more fit factors for the divine uses.

This is one of the great meanings of the kingdom processes. The Spirit of the Kingdom, taking the present factors in civilization, emancipating them more and more from evil ideals and uses, and transforming them to the service of moral and spiritual ends, will give them a place glorious in the completed history. It is a mission of the Holy Spirit to transfuse and to transform all the present life of man, until all the social, educational, and governmental factors of society shall render a coordinated and sanctified service toward the perfection of God's reign in the earth.

It must go without the saying that time is an element in the working out of God's moral plans for the world. In this respect it might not seem unreasonable to assume that the spiritual order may follow the analogy of the material development in creation. In preparing for man's coming, indefinite æons of time were employed in perfecting the material habitation. It may possibly require other indefinite æons for the moral perfecting of the race for whose coming so infinite forethought was given. Under the divinely quickening action, how-

ever, of social and moral evolution, now clearly within the vision of many ethical students, the moral transformation of the race may at any time move forward with such leaps and bounds as to fill a near history with its wonders.

But this whole view, whether near or far of realization, is alien to premillennialism. It calls, in case of the human family, for a premature, abrupt, and catastrophic termination of God's cosmic order of the universe.

Professor W. T. Davison, an eminent Christian thinker, has stated a far more rational philosophy of the kingdom. He says: "The kingdom is coming, not come; the church is making, not made. Christendom is, in a sense, a word of the past; its history may be traced out and written down. In a sense it is a word of the present, representing a mighty living force today. Still more is it a word of the future, for as yet we have not been able to see what 'Christianity' fully means. He was right who, in answer to the question, 'Is the Christian religion "played out"?' replied, 'It has not yet been tried.' The disciples of the kingdom are, as yet, far from having

exhausted the resources of the treasure house intrusted to their care."

Professor Borden Parker Bowne was one of the most acute Christian minds of this or of any other age. He says: "The kingdom is a growth, both in our understanding of it and in its realization. Our Lord spoke of it as a leaven, which was gradually to leaven the lump. Again, he described it as a seed which should grow up, first the blade, then the ear, and after that the full corn in the ear. And he even spoke of our knowledge of it as something to be slowly gained under the tuition of the Holy Spirit, whom he would send to guide his disciples into the truth. He brought the leaven, he planted the seed, he spoke the word; but the evolution and the understanding were committed to the ages."

We cannot bring ourselves to think that it is God's purpose by destructive fiat to translate the creations of human thought as increasingly developed in the civilizations into what only can appear as an infinite and meaningless waste. This would appear a sinister and inexplicable ruin of all that seems most prophetic in

the present intellectual outlook for the world. The very conception is scientifically irrational.

Among the most potential of kingdom factors is that which we may classify as scientific knowledge. In the last resort, knowledge is the only credential which entitles to an authoritative opinion. The misrule of the world has come largely from the sway of dogmas, beliefs, customs, all of which have fallen down under the touch of scientific analysis. Moral loyalty to God needs to be supplemented, illuminated, and enriched by a knowledge of God's thought. It is really the one mission of science to translate God's truth as written in nature to man's understanding and for man's guidance. The energies of Christ's ministry were largely expended in healing man's physical ills. The significance of this fact seems greatly to have been overlooked in subsequent Christian thought. Modern scientific knowledge has discovered in a wonderful way the divine secret of healing man's physical diseases and injuries. Modern medicine is a scientific art; surgery is a miracle-worker. But the reliability and

efficiency of medicine and surgery rest entirely upon knowledge. Not all the piety in the world, in the absence of knowledge, could substitute the beneficence of science. Sacrifices do not stop the ravages of plague, incantations do not ward off contagions, and even prayer does not furnish a general cure for tuberculosis.

An unscientific world is a superstitious world. It is the mission of science to rationalize nature. It is its art to subsidize all of nature's potencies for ministry to human weal. Science has turned nature's malarial plague-spots into healthful and inhabitable zones. It is exorcising from human beliefs and from human fears the witches, bogies, hobgoblins, demons, and all other uncanny creations of the superstitious imagination. Science transforms nature into a garden, and gives to the husbandman the secret of multiplying its fruitfulness. Science makes the great city not only the most sanitary abode for the multitudes, but it converts its very marts, council houses, art galleries, libraries, museums, printing houses, and parks into popular exchanges which minister all man-

ner of convenience and enrichment to the life of society. Science discovers and seizes upon nature's vast and hidden wealth, and lays it down as so much endowment upon the altars of human service. It invents appliances which infinitely expand the areas of human knowledge. It captures and subdues to man's uses the mightiest forces—thus gridironing the continents with railroads, covering the seas with merchandise, and binding the whole world together into a community of instant interintelligence and common interests.

Science is in its infancy. It is the sworn enemy of all intellectual jugglery. It is a great promoter of mental honesty. It begets in the minds of its devotees a supreme love of truth for truth's sake. It will move forward into an ever-widening career, yielding an infinite complexity of knowledge, of wealth, of service, to life until the very earth itself shall become a physical paradise. This is all in God's scheme. It is his ordination that scientific knowledge shall prepare the physical foundations on which shall rest Christ's perfected kingdom in the earth.

## CHAPTER X

## APOCALYPTIC VALUES

In the beginning of these meditations we went to the "Revelation of St. John" as to a chief, indeed, the sole source from whence is originally derived the doctrine of millennialism. Our conclusion is that this book in itself presents no authoritative grounds or justification for a millennial doctrine. This view, we have found, is widely and predominantly shared by biblical scholars. But such a conclusion is a very different thing from the ignoring or setting aside of the superlative religious values of the book of Revelation itself. The uses of this book as a calendar for Adventism, history has long since discounted and set aside.

"He cometh not a king to reign;
The world's long hope is dim;
The weary centuries watch in vain
The clouds of heaven for Him.

"Death comes, life goes; the asking eye
And ear are answerless;
The grave is dumb, the hollow sky
Is sad with silentness.

"The letter fails, and systems fall,
And every symbol wanes;
The Spirit over-brooding all
Eternal Love remains."

The supreme value of the Apocalypse is in its morally prophetic and spiritual lessons. No devout mind who thoughtfully seeks to know the message and genius of this book can fail to be stirred to the very soul by great reflections. Before taking leave of this work, it will be profitable for us to return, and to linger for a little amid the wonders of Patmos.

Historically, we know that the book encountered serious obstacles in reaching its place in the New Testament canon. It received a late acceptance by the Western Church, and for a much longer period its canonicity was opposed by the Eastern Church. Eusebius is on record among its adverse critics. Even Jerome, the very Father, as we might say, of the authorized Latin Scriptures, expresses doubt as to the proper canonicity of the book. It is well known that Luther, in his earliest edition of the New Testament, expresses himself as strongly averse to the book of Revela-

tion. Zwingli, the foremost Swiss Reformer, seriously called in question its canonical character. Its final acceptance in the canon would seem to have been largely decided by the urgent pressure of the Western Church.

Personally, I do not feel like making overmuch of these canonical difficulties as related to the Apocalypse. The book stands firm on its feet, a very colossus, amid all the surging seas of critical controversy. If it is rude, even mightily rugged, in its literary character, it is still a product imperishable as the hills. It suggests comparison with the Pilgrim's Progress. Bunyan's work defies, in many ways, accepted literary standards. But it is a book which has enthroned itself imperishably in Christian thought. Written by a condemned man within the cell of a prison-house, it has taken to itself the wings of universal publicity, and has been translated into all the literary languages of the earth. And so, this book of the earlier John, written amid the jagged rocks of Patmos, with the sound of the surf ever beating upon his ears, was born of inspira-

tions which transformed and illumined his island prison as by ineffable glories. Whatever the older critics may have said, *pro* or *con*, concerning the fitness of the Apocalypse for the New Testament canon, the book itself has marched down the centuries uttering without cease the trumpet-calls for a heroic fortitude and a triumphing cheer in the souls of tried and troubled saints. The book evidences its own inspirations. In times of stormy stress and of sore trial it has carried to multitudes a message of fortitude and hope which has been as a very voice of God from the clouds.

In the vividness of this author's vision he is ceaselessly attended by cohorts of angels who act for him as intermediary messengers between heaven and Patmos. The narrow island, designed as the prison-house of his doom, was transformed for John into a wireless receiving station for the moral universe. Think as we may about his originality—and it is true that we can definitely locate most of the literary sources whence his figures are drawn —it remains true that, whatever the

sources of his suggestion, or whatever the original uses of these sources, his originality consists in the fact that he freely utilizes for the ends of his own independent purposes all these sources. He gives his own, and new, meanings to the oldest statements.

In his statements as a teacher of Christianity no writer of the New Testament exceeds him either in intensity of conviction or loyalty of purpose. His letters to the "Seven Churches" reveal the most intimate and interested knowledge of the moral conditions of those churches. In most impressive terms of speech he deals with these churches in a spirit of firmness and fidelity worthy of an Old Testament prophet. His discernment penetrated to the very center of their conditions and needs. He was a courageous and faithful pastor. It has been well said that the book never has been excelled in marvelous creations of worshipful pictures. In these pictures the very heavens seem laid open to view. Under a remarkable variety of scene, heroes, saints, and angels are seen engaged in acts of highest worship before

the throne. The worshipers bow down before Him that sitteth upon the throne, worshiping Him that liveth for ever and ever, and casting their crowns before the throne, they say: "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created." The book is a summons to all moral intelligences for reverence and worship before God. No writings lay greater stress upon ethical qualities, none more emphasize the virtues of character, none make more heroic appeal to the Christian conscience, than do the writings of the Revelator.

These appeals, however, are largely set forth under forms of high color and of vivid imagery. No greater interpretive mistake could be made than to attempt the reduction of the Revelator's statements to literal verbal exactness. He is a poet whose imagination revels in all the spaces of thought. His word is pictorial. He frames his figures against large backgrounds. His emotions are intense. He feels the thrill of a prophet's ecstasy. The

lofty monotheism which inspired Isaiah with an unshrinking confidence in God's righteous and universal sovereignty over the earth was fully shared by the Revelator. God was to him also a God who, in the interests of his saints, would finally trample down all opposition from their presence.

Rome is the acknowledged mistress of the world. Her structure and power seem eternal. And Rome is now the great persecutor. But John does not hesitate to predict the utter overthrow, the breaking to pieces as a potter's vessel, of this apparently invincible world-power. In his vision he foresees clearly that the saints, who now seem so helpless, so hopeless, shall finally, under God's hand, come forth into glorious and eternal triumph.

The book of Revelation can be understood only in the light of its purpose. That purpose was not to forecast the events of universal Christian history. While it has its lessons for Christians of all times, its immediate and inclusive purpose, so far as its author was concerned, was to meet a passing and tragic crisis, a crisis which

was passing under his very eye, a very part of his own living experience.

As reviewers of the Apocalypse, then, and entirely aside from any factitious doctrines which may have been fastened upon the book, we would not do ourselves credit if we failed to recognize in its highly wrought literature the most imperative moral and spiritual values. The book especially, and in a wonderful way, extols the deific sovereignty of Jesus Christ. Whatever may be the preposterous and blasphemous claims for deific character as set forth by the Roman emperor, this ruler is ridiculed, belittled, and made contemptible when the Apocalyptic writer brings him into comparison with Jesus Christ. Christ is so divine, his providence so omnipotent, his pledge of eternal life to his own people so vivid and sure, as to convince the most hard-pressed saint that it were infinitely better to go to temporary martyrdom with Christ than to accept any honor whatsoever from the blasphemous emperor.

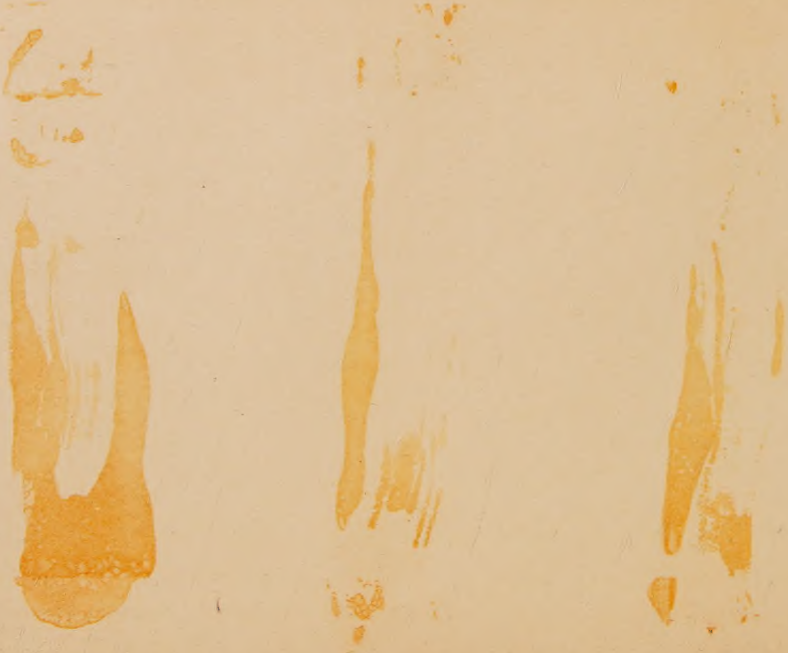
It is to be acknowledged as a fact worthy of emphasis that a belief in the

soon-coming of Christ to establish irresistibly his own kingdom in the earth, furnished a ground for heroic and sustaining inspirations to multitudes of men living in an age that was tottering to its fall through the sheer weight of its own corruptions. The pagan world of Saint Paul's day was godless, corrupt, pessimistic, hopeless. It was a world little touched by the inspirations of any great religious faith. Its atmosphere was materialistic, making it easy for men to be deniers of the gods, scoffers at things sacred, so enslaving themselves to natural appetites as to make themselves earthly, sensual, devilish. To such an age as this the voice of the Apocalypse was like a proclamation from a new Sinai, declaring that a righteous and omnipotent God still keeps his hand on this human world. It was a voice announcing the direct and supreme claims of Jehovah upon the hearts of men. It was a divine heralding to an otherwise hopeless age, that God would be forever the faithful and unfailing Friend of the righteous. This kind of apocalyptic faith girded early Christianity with an invincible heroism

which has given immortal luster to its history. It was this faith which sustained the church of the martyrs through the tragic centuries of persecution—persecution waged for the very destruction of the infant church by the world power of Rome. Through that long and nameless ordeal of dungeon, sword, and fire the church could not have been sustained by a mild and quietistic faith. It needed apocalyptic inspirations—inspirations reenforced by the pageantries of the skies.

In the meantime, for us, so far as the "Book of Revelation" is concerned, while we must firmly and steadily refuse to treat it as a time calendar for a belated and obsessed school of prophecy, it nevertheless is a book for us to read upon our knees, and in a spirit of profound and wondering devotion. It is a book that sweeps moral immensities. It crowns Christ King. It is a matchless dynamo of inspiration for souls tossed in the throes of moral struggle. It does not make its appeals to the indolent, the indifferent, to men not responsive to the bugle-calls for heroic action. But to the militant right-

eous, to the man enlisted for the strenuous Christian life, the man who at every call of duty thrills with the instinct of "going over the top," this book is like an electric connection with God's own heart. For all saints in spiritual extremity, it is a matchless tonic. As no other book in the Bible, it illuminates the vision of struggling heroes and of dying martyrs. To all such it is a blazing beacon that lights the portals to an eternal, perfect, and indescribable victory.



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